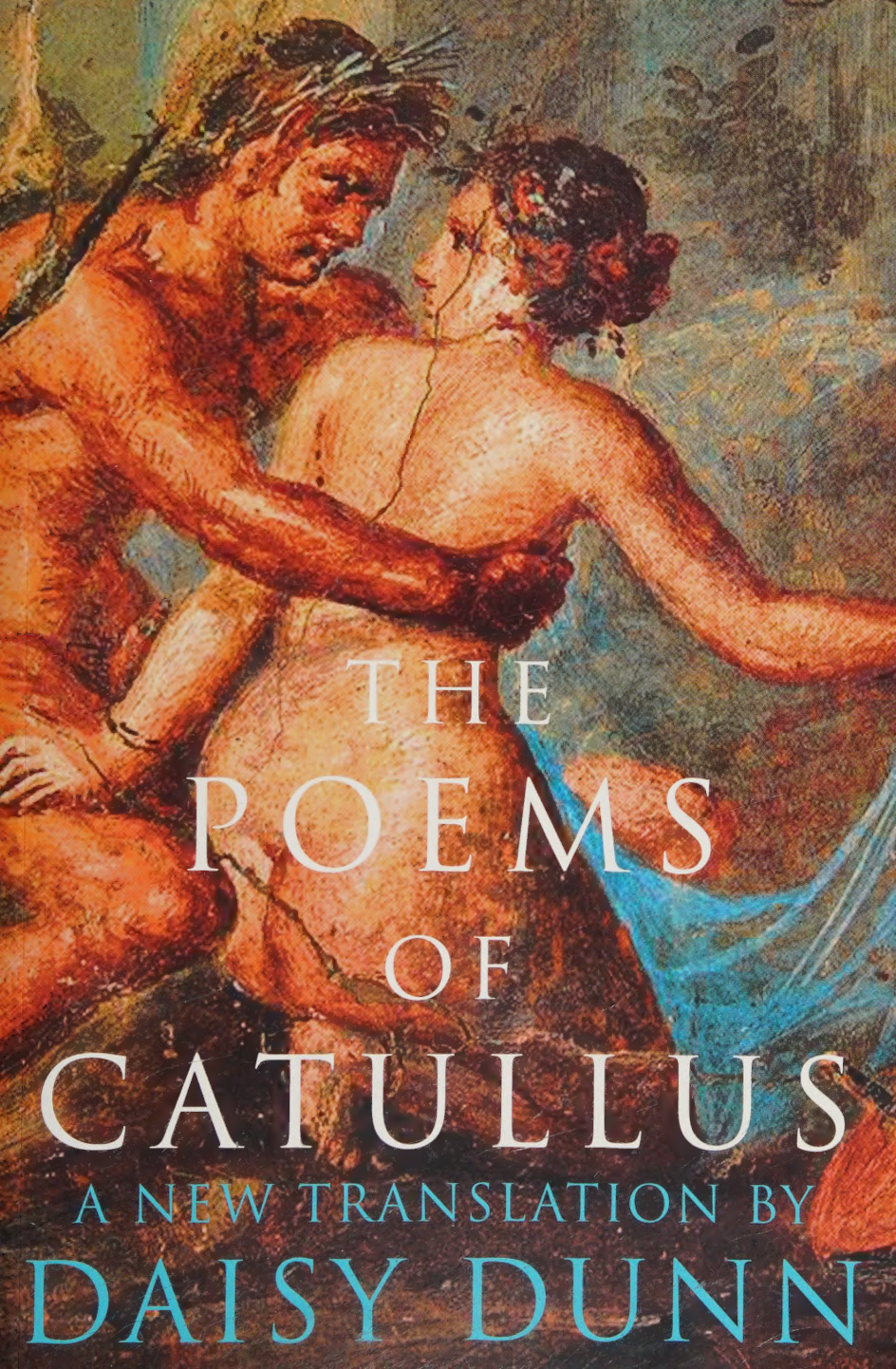




THE
POEMS
OF
CATULLUS
A NEW TRANSLATION BY
DAISY DUNN

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If any of you chance to become readers

Of my untimely ramblings and your hands

Do not tremble to thumb my scroll . . .

Introduction

On an autumn night in 1962 the poet Robert Lowell ambled through Cambridge, Massachusetts, as far as 35 Brewster Street. He had walked this broad, tree-lined road before as a young student, grasping a bundle of pages, pale grey with pencilled words. His manuscript had weighed heavily upon him as he approached a large gabled house on the road's midpoint. He was now forty-five and no longer in need of affirmation of his talent; his verse translation of Racine's *Phaedra* had recently been feted. But he longed to recall the bewildering array of what lay beyond the walls of this dwelling.

In January 1963 his sometime mentor Robert Frost, the great poetic master of pastoral and everyday experience, passed away. 'The lights were out that night; they were out for good now,' wrote Lowell, reflecting on the moment, just months earlier, that he revisited the cold threshold of Frost's former home: 'Its narrow gray wood was a town cousin of the farmhouses he wrote about, and stood on some middle ground between luxury and poverty. It was a traveler from the last century that had inconspicuously drifted over the customs border of time . . . I can easily imagine the barish rooms, the miscellaneous gold-lettered old classics, the Georgian poets, the Catullus by his bedside, the iron stove where he sometimes did his cooking, and the stool drawn up to his visitor's chair so that he could ramble and listen.'¹

Robert Frost read the poetry of Catullus often, mesmerised by his words and the weight and complexity of his sentiments. New England shared little ground with ancient Verona, the nascent town south of the Alps where Catullus was born c.82 BC, or Rome, where he lived in the fraught times before Julius Caesar waged his civil war and the Republic

fell to pieces. But Catullus' passions were timeless, and free, far outliving his brief thirty years on this earth. His 'little book' (*libellus*), a series of over a hundred poems referred to merely by number, and arranged by a mysterious hand in an order that lacks chronology – though not thought – appealed to Frost's appetite for subtle expression. There could be no better place for Catullus' poetry book than the bedside, where Frost kept the slim volume Lowell spied in his clapboard house.

Gaius Valerius Catullus, whom scholars often see as the inventor of Latin love elegy, once wrote of how, 'Undone by passion I tossed and turned all over the bed . . .'² He had spent a long 'lazy day' drinking wine, carousing and composing verse with his dear poet friend, Gaius Licinius Calvus Macer, whom he referred to merely as Calvus ('Suave, suave Calvus', 'my dear Calvus') in further poems. Catullus also wove the finest poem he ever wrote around a bedspread, which he embroidered with the myths of Theseus and Ariadne, sister of the Phaedra who inspired Robert Lowell's play of 1961.

Frost was probably unaware of how far his bedside copy of Catullus coloured Lowell's experience of his smart Brewster Street home. Catullus' book shone more brightly than any of the others in his library, which Lowell's eyes darted off too eagerly to render more than 'miscellaneous'. The younger poet's description of the house itself as 'a town cousin of the farmhouses he wrote about' even evokes one of Catullus' poems, in which he described his retreat on the outskirts of Rome: 'Dear country pile of mine, whether Sabine or Tiburtine . . . your suburban dwelling . . .'³

The grandeur of Frost's former residence and its smart surroundings might have felt at variance with what Lowell described as 'some middle ground between luxury and poverty', but Catullus courted the same indeterminate line. Across his 117 surviving poems, which are translated in full in this volume,⁴ arise several references to men who are cash poor but asset rich.⁵ A certain Furius, very probably a contemporary

rival poet called Furius Bibaculus, ‘has neither slave nor savings’, but possesses a little villa with ‘a bill fifteen-thousand-two-hundred steep’ (Poem 26). Poverty, moreover, was a rich man’s fashion. While Catullus came from a wealthy family, with houses in Verona and on the most beautiful peninsula of Lake Garda (Sirmione, see Poem 31), and who counted among their friends and dining guests Julius Caesar himself, Catullus could still complain that his wallet was empty, ‘full of cobwebs’, and request that a friend provide him with the food and accoutrements required for a lively dinner party (Poem 13).

If Frost’s house recalled a ‘traveler from the last century’, then Catullus’ poetry was the place where travellers converged and traded in new tongues. Familiar as he was with the poetry of his Greek and Roman forebears, he ingeniously combined ideas from a variety of genres, including epigram, epic, and comedy, and imposed upon them a new vocabulary, forging many neologisms – new words – and affectations; he was particularly partial to the diminutive, which he employed for pathos and affection as often as he did for size. In Poems 2 and 3, for example, he describes the sparrow that belongs to his favourite lover, whom he refers to in his poetry as ‘Lesbia’. She was, in all likelihood, Clodia Metelli, from one of the oldest and most prominent families in Rome. She was married to the Roman senator Metellus Celer until 59 BC, when she was widowed. Catullus describes what was nominally her pet bird and the ‘small release’, *solaciolum* (a diminutive) it gave her from her frustration. In death, the sparrow is *miselle passer* (‘poor little sparrow’); in life, *deliciae . . . puellae*, his ‘girl’s darling’.

Deliciae, like *iucundus* (‘pleasant’), was part of the vocabulary Catullus used to communicate his poetic taste. These words prove difficult to translate in English, but for me *deliciae* in Poem 2 has become ‘apple of my girl’s eye’, since I venture also to suggest that the last three lines of Poem 2, which many commentators view as a distinct fragment, belong

with his sparrow lines. Just as the little bird provides relief, Catullus imagines that Atalanta, the indomitable huntress of Greek myth, finds relief when a suitor beats her in a foot race – after she slows to pick up some golden apples – and wins her hand.

The nature of Poem 68 in the collection is problematic. Catullus addresses the first part of it to a certain Manlius, probably the young nobleman Manlius Torquatus, for whom he also wrote the wedding hymn at Poem 61 (other hymns may be found at Poem 34 and Poem 62: they have a marked formality). The second part is addressed to an Allius. The poem probably started life as separate poems. In this edition, I have demarcated the two main parts with a line break.

Like Lowell seeking the approval of Frost, Catullus spent time offering his work to fellow poets to edit, and digesting theirs in turn. He belonged not so much to a fixed coterie as to a loose set of like-minded individuals who enjoyed a shared language and poetic heritage. They knew that when Catullus asked for ‘salt’, he was seeking more than a condiment: he wanted wit and urbanity. It would be a pity to lose the word in a translation of his work.

In Poem 95, Catullus celebrates the publication of his friend and fellow poet Gaius Helvius Cinna’s work *Zmyrna*, which described an act of incest between a princess and her father. Catullus compares it favourably with some *Annals* by a certain Volusius, which in Poem 36 he describes with more colour as *cacata carta* (‘shit-smear’d sheets’). There is a corruption in the text, but it seems likely that Volusius is described as coming from Hatria, near Padua, and producing ‘five hundred thousand’ verses in one year. Such productivity was reason enough for Catullus to despise him. Catullus, Cinna, Calvus, whom together Cicero would describe as *poetae novi*, ‘new poets’, were united in their preference for brevity and concision over verbosity.

This was a stylistic feature that Lowell, too, was taught

to savour. The manuscript he carried to Robert Frost as a young man, he once recalled, was heavy with words.⁶ He had written, in barely legible pencil, an epic on the First Crusade in blank verse. Taking hold of it, Frost began to read as far as his eyes and patience allowed. 'It goes on rather a bit, doesn't it?' Frost said, and retrieved from elsewhere in the room a copy of Keats' *Hyperion*, which he read aloud, as Catullus did his own poetry, and circulated also in written form.⁷ Lowell would learn to refine his art, and to great effect.

Catullus received a similar education at the hands of the god Apollo – through the Greek poetry of Callimachus, one of the finest writers from the great Library of Alexandria. In the third century BC, Callimachus wrote of how the god instructed him to fatten animals for sacrifice, but keep his poetry slender, inventive, *recherché*, 'even if you drive a narrower path'.⁸ In 'The Road Not Taken', Robert Frost proudly took the road 'less traveled by'. Catullus worked in accordance with these precepts, and translated several of Callimachus' poems from Greek into Latin. Catullus' Poem 66, written from the viewpoint of a lock of hair that belonged to Queen Berenice II, wife of Ptolemy III Euergetes of third-century BC Alexandria, was a close translation of a Greek poem by Callimachus.

Poem 64, though Catullus' longest surviving poem at over four hundred lines, adheres to Callimachus' advice for reducing an otherwise long tale to a tight and erudite poem. It overflows with subtle allusions to the work of earlier poets, including Apollonius of Rhodes, author of the *Argonautica*, and Ennius, author of a Latin *Medea*. At the beginning of Poem 64 Catullus describes the flight of the *Argo*, which he viewed as the first ship ever to have sailed. It is so novel that he can refer to it only as a 'flying chariot'. As often, the oars on which it sails are 'palms of the hand'; these are delights which must be preserved in English.

I came to translate Catullus' poems in the process of writing *Catullus' Bedspread*, a book about the poet's life and

work in which I explore the ‘flying chariot’ and characters of Poem 64. I challenged myself to keep as true to the Latin as I could – a difficult task since Latin is a far more economical language than English – while retaining the life and tone of the original verse. At times this called for interpolation: Catullus addressed several poems to ‘Mentula’ (‘Cock’), a none-too-flattering nom de plume for Caesar’s subordinate in the Gallic War, Mamurra. In Poem 7, where he speaks to Lesbia of the number of kisses he desires of her, Catullus uses the word *basiationes*. The standard Latin for kisses was *oscula*, but Catullus appears to have favoured *basia* because the word’s origins were probably Celtic. His native Verona was part of Gaul for as long as he lived. I have tried to convey the equivalent by using French, *gros bisous*, for *basiationes*, which gives the size of these great kisses, almost diminutives in reverse.⁹

I felt that the bones of some of Catullus’ more striking constructions deserved airing in order that the spirit of the Latin can live on in the English. His poems occasionally read strangely in Latin. In Poem 22, for example, Catullus repeatedly refers to ‘the same man’, ‘that same man’, ‘the same fellow’, which some scholars have sought to explain as a hint that the poem’s subject, Suffenus, was in fact synonymous with Varus, the poem’s addressee.¹⁰

Catullus used a variety of poetic metres. Poem 64 was written in hexameters, the metre of epic, which gave it more weight than many of his other poems, such as the elegiacs, which make up the last fifty poems in the book as it is arranged. Poem 63, in which Catullus describes a man named Attis castrating himself in honour of an ancient Eastern goddess (he refers to him from that point on as a ‘she’), was the first Latin poem to be written in galliambics, a feisty metre chosen to reflect the strangeness of the foreign rites: the goddess’ eunuch priests were known as *galli*.

I have not sought to recreate the Latin metres Catullus used. I wanted the freedom to render his words as I saw fit,

and reflect on the difficulties of seeking an English equivalent for the sound of Latin verse. An elegiac couplet in English will not sound like a Latin elegiac couplet when read aloud. Robert Frost discovered the difficulty of replicating Latin metres when he decided to write his poem 'For Once, Then, Something', in hendecasyllables – one of Catullus' favourite Latin metres – formed of eleven-syllable lines. 'Everybody just thinks it's my kind of blank verse,' Frost said, at once delighted and vexed that his poem, 'calculated to tease the metrists', had succeeded in blinding his critics.¹¹

Gestures may still be made to reflect the sound of Catullus' Latin, whilst making it appeal to the modern eye and ear. In the love poems, the languor of the Gallic tongue may still be heard. Catullus' early Latin readers, though far more familiar with mythology and Greek literature than we are today, might still have had use of a commentary to read Poem 64. Attempts to reflect the sound of Catullus' Latin have led me to shape stanzas out of the continuous text and shorten the line length in the earlier part of this poem, where the rhythm and sound of the ship, the *Argo*, moving through the water resounds clearly. It is hoped that this will aid with the reading of this richly complex poem.¹²

It is the poise of Catullus' poems that has gripped me amid the passion of his words, and this that I have tried to capture in translating them. I hope they will speak to today's reader, and confirm that while Catullus is ripe for the bedside, he is not yet ready to be put to bed.

THE POEMS

I

I dedicate the elegant new little book
That I polished off not a moment ago
With dry pumice stone to who,
But you, Cornelius. For you always did think
That my ramblings were something,
Though you were the only man of Italy brave enough
In those days to unravel our whole history in
 three volumes –
Learned ones, by Jupiter, and exhaustive.
So have this little book, whatever it is
And whatever its worth; only please, virgin muse,
May it survive unceasing for over a hundred years.

II

Sparrow, apple of my girl's eye,
Often she plays with you, holds you in her lap,
Gives you a fingertip when you want it
And urges you to take passionate bites
Whenever she wishes, gleaming in desire for me,
To play with something for pleasure.
And I believe it provides a small release from her
Frustration, as then the intolerable burning fades.
I wish that I could play with you as she does
And lighten the ponderous cares of my mind . . .
I would be as grateful as they say the quick-stepped
Atalanta was for the little golden apple
That loosed the chastity belt that bound her long.

III

Mourn, Venuses and Cupids
And all who have tasted love.
My girl's sparrow is dead.
Sparrow, apple of my girl's eye
Whom she loved more than her own eyes
For he was honey-sweet and knew his owner
As well as a girl knows her own mother.
He never shifted himself from her lap
But hopping around

Cheep here

Cheep there
 Would chirp continuously to his mistress only.
 But now he travels that shadowy path
 From which they allow no return.
 Shame on you, cruel darkness of the
 Underworld who devours all beautiful things
 As you have stolen pretty Sparrow from me.
 Criminal deed. Poor little sparrow.
 It is your fault the darling eyes of my girl
 Are now swollen and red from weeping.

IV

That little kidney bean you see before you, friends,
Says she was once the very fastest of ships
And that no floating plank in onward surge
Could outstrip her whether she made her flight
On hand-like oars or canvas,
And she says neither the shore of the dangerous Adriatic
Denies this nor the Cycladic islands
Nor upstanding Rhodes nor the savage Thracian
Propontis nor the harsh gulf of the Black Sea
Where that yacht to be was formerly
Long-haired forest – for on the ridge of Mount Cytoris
Her whispery hair would whistle.
Pontic Amastris and boxwood-bearing Cytoris,
Yacht says this was – still is – all very familiar to you.
At the very beginning, she says,
She was rooted on your heights
And soaked her hand-like oars in your waters,
And from there she carried her master
Over many unstoppable waves, regardless of whether
The breeze summoned her from port or starboard
Or Jupiter fell favourably upon both her sheets alike.
No vows were made on her behalf to the gods
On the shore when she set out on her last voyage
From the sea all the way to this limpid lake.
But this belongs to the past. Now she has been put away
To grow old peacefully and dedicates herself to you,
Twin Castor and twin of Castor, Pollux.

V

We should live, my Lesbia, we should love,
We should value at a penny all
The rumours of our elders – they are dourer than most.
The sun can set and rise again
But once our short light has passed beneath its yardarm
We must sleep a night that never ends.
Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred
Then another thousand, then a second hundred.
Then – don't stop – another thousand, then a hundred
Then when we have shared many thousands
We shall confound them so no one can know
Or cast an evil eye upon us
When he knows that our kisses are so many.

VI

Flavius, if your lover were not
Inelegant and unrefined you would want to speak –
Would not be able *not* to speak – about her to Catullus.
No doubt you're in love with some feverish
Little slut and it shames you to confess it.
See, for all its silence your bed betrays
The nights you sleep are not sexless:
Steeped in flowers and the oil of Syrian olive,
Knackered and tattered, pillows everywhere,
Creaking and shaking,
The trembling bedstead shattered.
If shame did not rule you, you would reveal all.
Why, you would not flash such toned love-handles
If you were not engaged in some dalliance.
So whatever news you have, be it good or bad,
Tell me. I want to proclaim you and your lover
To the skies in elegant verse.

VII

You want to know how many of your *gros bisous*,
Lesbia, would be enough for me, enough to spare?
As great as the number of grains of Libyan sand
That lie on silphium-bearing Cyrene
Between the oracle of steamy Jupiter
And the holy tomb of old King Battus;
Or as many as the stars, when night is quiet,
That watch the secretive liaisons of men:
To give you this many kisses
Is enough and more for crazy Catullus,
Which neither meddlers could count out
Nor utter evil spells about.

VIII

Stop being a fool, you failure, Catullus,
And accept what you see has died, is dead.
Once the sun shone brightly upon you,
When you went wherever the girl directed,
Loved by us as much as no woman again will be loved.
A lot of fun was had back there –
You were keen for it and the girl was not unwilling.
Yes, the sun truly shone brightly upon you.
Now she wants no more. And you, though weak,
Should not want it either, nor run after her as she flees,
Nor live in misery, but persevere with hardened heart,
 be strong.
Farewell, lover. Now Catullus is being strong.
He will not ask after you, or ask you out: you are not
 interested.
But you will be sorry when you are asked by no one.
So it is, wretched woman. What life remains for you yet?
Who's going to approach you now, or consider you
 beautiful?
Whom now will you love, or whose lover will they say
 you are?
Whom will you kiss? Whose lips will you bite?
But you, Catullus, pause. Be strong.

IX

Veranius, had I three hundred thousand
Friends, you would still be number one.
Have you come home to your household gods,
And the brothers who take after you, and elderly mother?
You have. How happy I am at this news.
I shall see you safe and sound and hear you as you speak
Of the landscapes and habits and nations of the Spaniards
The way you always do, and throwing myself around your
Neck I shall kiss your charming mouth and eyes.
Of all men of great good fortune,
Who is happier or more fortunate than me?

X

I was idling in the Forum when my friend Varus
 Saw me and led me off to the home of his lover,
 A little tart (as she immediately struck me),
 Though not obviously inelegant or lacking in charm.
 When we arrived here we got lost in conversation,
 One topic, then another, such as what Bithynia
 Was like today, and how it had gone,
 And how much profit it had made me.
 I told it as it was – it brought nothing for the natives
 Or the praetors or the cohort,
 Which was why no one's head was any glossier –
 Particularly for those who had a fuckwit as a praetor,
 Who split not a hair over his entourage.
 'But surely,' they said, 'You procured litter-bearers there,
 Which they say are native to the region.'
 To make myself singularly more attractive to the girl
 I said, 'Although it was a bad province
 Things did not go so badly for me
 That I could not obtain eight straight-backed boys.'
 (But in fact I had no one from here or there
 Who could lift even the broken foot of an old bed
 Onto his shoulders.) And she, as sluttier girls will, said,
 'Will you lend them to me a while, dear Catullus,
 I want to take a ride to Serapis.'
 'Wait,' I told her,
 'What I said I had a moment ago . . .
 My mind flew – my friend,
 Gaius, Cinna – obtained them as his own.
 But what difference does it make if they're mine or his?
 I use them as if I bought them myself,
 But you, you are so vulgar and meddlesome
 That I can't be off my guard at all!'

XI

Furius and Aurelius, you are my friends.
Should Catullus penetrate furthest India,
Where the shore is pounded by the far-
Resounding wave of Oceanus in the East,
Or reach the Hyrcani and effeminate Arabs,
Or the Sacae or arrow-bearing Parthians,
Or Egypt where waters from the
Seven-mouthed Nile spread their colour.
Or should he step over the high Alps
As he visits the monuments of great Caesar,
The Gallic Rhine, and terrifying
And far-off Britons –
All of which, and whatever else the will
Of the gods may bring, you are ready
To attempt together;
Deliver a few words, unpleasant ones,
To my girl:
May she live and flourish with her lovers,
Three hundred of whom she holds in a single embrace,
Loving none truly but repeatedly breaking
All their balls;
And may she not expect my love as she did before,
Which through her fault has fallen like a flower
On the edge of a meadow, touched
By a plough passing by.

XII

Asinius Marrucinus, you put bad use to
 Your left hand when you filch the napkins
 Of people who are distracted by laughter and wine.
 Do you think it witty?
 Then sense eludes you, you are out of touch:
 It is as low and charmless a deed as can be.
 Don't you believe me? Then believe Pollio,
 Your brother, who would be happy to pay
 A talent to end your thievery, for he is a boy
 Who brims with grace and wit.
 So either be prepared for three hundred rude verses
 Or send me back my napkin –
 It's not the value of it that bothers me,
 But the fact it is a memento of my friendship.
 For my Fabullus and Veranius
 Sent me Saetabis napkins as a gift from Spain
 So I must love them as I do my
 Little Veranius and Fabullus.

XIII

You will dine well chez moi, my Fabullus
In a few days, gods willing –
But only if you bring with you a tasty big
Dinner – and don't forget a sparkling girl
And wine and salt and all the laughter.
If you bring these, as I say, my charmer,
You will dine well. For the wallet
Of your Catullus is full of cobwebs.
In return you will have unadulterated sex
Or whatever is more luscious or refined:
For I will give you the scent that
The Venuses and Cupids gave my girl,
And when you smell it, you will ask the gods
To make you, Fabullus, all nose.

XIV

If I did not love you more than my own eyes,
Suave, suave Calvus, that gift
Would make me hate you as much as Vatinius hates you.
What have I done or what have I said
To make you waste my time on so many bad poets?
May the gods heap misfortune upon the client
Who sent you such offensive works.
But if, as I suspect, Sulla the grammarian
Gave you this unique and recherché gift
Then as I see it there's no problem,
I'm pleased, because your efforts are not your ruin.
Great gods, what a holy mess of a book!
There's no doubt you sent it to your Catullus
So that he would die at once,
On the Saturnalia as well, the very best of days!
But this isn't over, you joker.
For tomorrow (if it comes!), I shall run over to the book
 stalls
And gather all the poison from the works of Caesius,
 Aquinus,
Suffenus, and pay you back with those tortures.
And as for you, off from here,
Go back to the place you left on an ungainly foot,
Unsuited to our times, the very worst of poets.

XIVb

If any of you chance to become readers
Of my untimely ramblings and your hands
Do not tremble to thumb my scroll . . .

XV

I put myself and my love in your hands,
Aurelius. I ask a modest favour:
If ever in your heart you have yearned
To desire something that is pure and intact,
Keep the boy safe for me,
I don't mean from the public – I have no fear
Of them, passing through the piazza, here one moment,
There the next, buried in their own business –
But from you and your penis, that's what I fear,
A danger to good boys and bad alike.
Go seduce whomever you please, as you please,
As often as you wish, whenever you're out,
Only make this one boy an exception,
A modest request, I believe.
But if a cruel mind and rampant desire
Drive you to commit such a crime
Against me, you bastard,
Then I pity you and your hideous fate.
For your feet will be bound and your backdoor
Pushed open so radishes and mullets can run you through.

XVI

I shall fuck you anally and orally
Cock-in-mouth Aurelius and sodomite Furius,
Since you judge me by my short poems
Because they are sexy, not pure enough.
It is only right that a poet is restrained and proper
In himself but there is no need at all for his
Little poems to be so.
What's more they have salt and elegance
Despite being sexy and not pure enough
And even have the power to inspire the urge for sex –
I don't mean in boys, but in those hoary old men
Who struggle to raise their cocks up hard.
And because you read of many thousands of kisses
You think me barely male?
I shall fuck you anally and orally.

XVII

Colony, *o colonia*, you long to frolic on the long bridge
And you're ready and waiting to dance, but fear
The ill-fitting legs of old timber on which
The poor thing stands will fall flat and
Slump into the void-like swamp below.
So may you have an accomplished new bridge,
The best you can imagine,
On which the rites of Salisubsalus can be performed.
Grant me this gift, Colony, it would bring so many smiles.
I am happy for a certain townsman of mine to go
Headlong, head over feet from your bridge into the mud
Where lies the marsh with the deadliest stench
In the whole expanse, and the deepest waters, too.
The man is as backward as they come, his learning no match
For a two-year-old boy jogging on the knee of his sleeping
father.
A girl married him at the peak of her fertility,
A girl friskier than a delicate little goat kid
Who merits being guarded more closely than grapes at their
blackest,
Yet he allows her to play as she likes, he doesn't split a hair,
Nor rouse himself on his own account, but just as an alder
tree
Hewn by a Ligurian axe lies in a ditch
Experiencing everything as if it were nothing at all,
The fool I am describing sees nothing, hears nothing,
And whether or not he exists himself – that he does not
know either.
So now I want to send him headfirst from your bridge,
In the hope it might shake him of a sudden
From his wearying idleness
And leave his lazy mind in the cloying mud,
As a mule does her iron slipper in a sticky chasm.

XXI

Aurelius, father of hungers,
Not just of these now, but all those of the past
Or the present or of years to come,
You long to bugger my beloved.
You make no secret of it.
No sooner are you flirting together
Than clinging to his side and trying everything on.
But to no avail, for I shall poke you with
My devious prick before you stick one in.
If you were self-sufficient when you did it I wouldn't
say a word.
But this is what grieves me, that
My boy is now learning to be needy and thirsty.
So stop, while any glimmer of shame remains,
So you don't meet your end through buggery.

XXII

That Suffenus, Varus, a man you know too well,
 Is a charming and sociable and sophisticated soul.
 The same man writes by far the most verses –
 I reckon ten thousand or more have
 Been written by him, and not just drafted on
 Second-hand papyrus as one normally would:
 His paper is top notch, his scrolls are new
 The scroll knobs, new, and the covers and red tie-thongs,
 All lead-ruled and smoothed with pumice stone.
 When you read them, that smart and sophisticated
 Suffenus suddenly seems like any old goat-milker
 Or digger, such is the transformation and discrepancy.
 What are we to make of it? He who once seemed a wit
 Or still sharper than a wit, if there is such a thing,
 That same man is duller than the dull countryside
 As soon as he touches poetry, nor is the same fellow ever
 As happy as when he is writing poetry:
 He is so pleased with himself and amazes himself so
 much,
 But indeed we are all fools, for you could see a bit of
 Suffenus
 In us all: each of us has been assigned his own fault,
 We just don't see the baggage on our own back.

XXIII

Furius, you have neither slave nor savings
Nor bug nor spider nor fire,
But you do have a father and stepmother
Whose teeth can even grind granite.
You get on well with both your father
And the wooden wife of your father –
No wonder. For you are in splendid health
With excellent digestion, no fears –
Not fires, not grievous building collapses,
Not criminal activity, not creeping poison,
Nor any other threat of danger.
And you have bodies drier than horn
Or whatever is more withered
By sun and cold and hunger,
Why wouldn't you be well and happy?
But you lack sweat, lack saliva,
Mucus and nasal congestion.
To this cleanliness add more than cleanliness
For your anus is cleaner than a salt-cellar
And doesn't shit ten times a full year
And when it does it's harder than bean and stone
So if you were to rub and crush it in your hands
You could never dirty a finger.
Don't knock or take these happy conveniences
For granted, Furius, and stop begging for
A hundred thousand sesterces as you always do:
You are fortunate enough.

XXIV

You are the little flower of the Juventii,
Not only of those who live today,
But of all those who have lived
Or will live in years to come.
I'd sooner you had given the wealth of Midas
To that man who has neither slave nor savings
Than allow yourself to be loved by him as you do.
'Why? Is he not of noble stock?' You will say. He is.
But though noble he has neither slave nor savings.
Discard or belittle this advice as you like,
But he has neither slave nor savings.

XXV

Cocksucker Thallus, softer than the hair on a rabbit
Or the fine marrow of a goose or a little earlobe
Or an old man's floppy penis and its bed of spider web,
At the same time, Thallus,
More rapacious than a violent storm
When the goddess . . . [corruption in text] . . . reveals
The crowd is off-guard,
Give me back the cloak you flew upon,
And my Spanish napkin and Bithynian sketches
You carry with you as candidly as if they were your
 heirlooms,
Unglue them, fool, from your talons and return them at
 once
If you don't want the unforgiving lash to mark your
Fleece-soft thighs and delicate little hands in shame
And to burn in a new way, like a little ship
Caught in the big blue as the wind wages like a madman.

XXVI

Furius, your little villa faces not
The South winds nor the West
Nor the harsh Northerlies nor the Easterlies,
But a bill fifteen-thousand-two-hundred steep.
Oh shivering, pernicious wind!

XXVII

Boy, server of vintage Falernian,
Pour me stronger cups
As the law of our hostess Postumia dictates,
Drunker than a drunken grape.
And you, water, spoiler of wine, away from here
S'il vous plaît. Off you pop to the dour kind.
Here is Bacchus' wine, neat.

XXVIII

Cronies of Piso, empty-hand cohort,
Baggage equipped for marching light,
Veranius, best of men, and you, dear Fabullus,
What suffer you? Haven't you endured
Enough cold and hunger with that waste of space?
Do your expense accounts reveal any slight profit
As mine – after, following my praetor's example,
I recorded expenditure as gain?
Oh Memmius, for long now you've excelled at slowly
Inserting the length of that pole of yours into my face
As I lie flat out. But as far as I can see you have both fared
Just the same, for you are screwed by no smaller a cock.
Seek noble friends, they say.
May the gods and goddesses punish you harshly,
Blots upon Romulus and Remus.

XXIX

Who but a shameless, grasping gambler
 Could look on, who could endure it,
 As Mamurra acquires the riches Long-Haired Gaul
 Once had, and remotest Britain, too?
 Penetrated Romulus, will you look at this and put up
 with it?
 And will he, all puffed up now and spilling over with
 self-love
 Go swaggering through everyone's bedchambers
 Like a white-flecked dove or Adonis?
 Penetrated Romulus, will you look at this and put up
 with it?
 You are a shameless, grasping gambler.
 Was it on his account, unparalleled commander,
 That you were on the remotest island in the west,
 So that your overindulged Cock, Mentula,
 Might absorb twenty or thirty million sesterces?
 What is this, but ill-advised liberality?
 Has he not pissed on or gormandised enough?
 First his family inheritance was squandered,
 Then the booty from Pontus, then thirdly
 That of Spain, as the gold-bearing River Tagus knows:
 Now we fear for Gaul and Britain.
 Why nurture this disgrace? What are his strengths,
 Other than devouring inherited wealth?
 Was it on his account, most dedicated men of the city,
 Father- and son-in-law, that you lost everything?

XXX

Heedless Alfenus, false to true friends,
Will you have no pity on your sweet amigo,
Hard-hearted, will you betray me,
Not hesitate to deceive me, now of all times? Traitor.
The sky-lying gods take no pleasure
In the impious acts of dishonest men
But you neglect me and abandon me in my misery and
malady.
Ah, what is a man to do, tell me, who is he to trust?
You bade me hand you my heart, unfairly,
Inducing me to love as if everything would be fine
But now you stand back and allow the winds and clouds
To carry all your words and deeds away, empty.
You may forget but the gods remember, Faith remembers,
And you will be sorry for what you do tomorrow.

XXXI

Eyelet of almost islands, Sirmio, and of islands,
And whatever each Neptune balances on
Pure waters and expanse of sea,
How gladly, how happily I look upon you,
Hardly even believing that I have left Thynia
And the Bithynian plains and see you in safety.
Oh what is happier than when the mind
Releases its worries, lays down its burden, and
Wearied from foreign labour we come to our hearth
And find repose on the bed we have longed for?
This alone is worth struggles so great.
Hello to you, charming Sirmio, and rejoice as I,
Your master, rejoice. And you, Lydian waves of the lake,
Laugh with all the laughter we have at home.

XXXII

I am going to make love to you, my sweet Ipsitilla,
My darling, my charming creature,
Invite me to your home for a midday favour.
And if you do, help me out:
Let no one bolt the door
And don't be tempted to go out,
But stay home and make ready for us
And nine consecutive fucks.
And if you decide yes, please invite me at once,
For I have eaten and lie here supine and sated –
I poke through my tunic and cloak.

XXXIII

Most skilled of the bath-house thieves,
Vibennius the father and his sodomite son
(The father has the filthier right hand
But the son's anus is the more voracious),
Why not go into exile on some wretched shore
Since your thievery is public knowledge
And your son's hairy buttocks –
Could you not sell them for a penny?

XXXIV

We are the trusted maidens
And pure boys of Diana:
[As pure boys of Diana]
And maidens let us sing.

Oh daughter of Latona, great child
Of Jupiter greatest and best,
Your mother delivered you near
The Delian olive grove

So you could be mistress of the mountains
And greening woods
And secluded glades
And sounding streams:

Called Juno Lucina
By women in painful labour,
Called powerful Trivia of the Crossroads,
You are Luna of reflected light.

With your monthly passage, goddess,
You measure the course of the years,
You fill the rustic estate
Of the farmer with fruitful gain.

May you be known by whatever
Holy name you like,
May you, as before, bring kind assistance
To the people of Romulus.

XXXV

Dear papyrus, please tell
My friend Caecilius the love poet
To leave behind the buildings of New Como
And beaches of Larius and come to Verona.
I want him to hear some thoughts from
A mutual friend of ours.
If he's sensible, he'll eat up the road,
Although the shining girl may summon him back
A thousand times as he goes, and throw
Both arms around his neck, and beg him to linger.
For if my report is true, she
Is undone by the strength of her love for him.
For as soon as she read his unfinished
Mistress of Dindymus, fires of passion
Coursed the inner paths of the poor girl's marrow.
And I don't blame you – you're more learned
A girl than the Sapphic Muse; for it is charmingly
Unfinished, Caecilius' Great Mother.

XXXVI

Annals of Volusius, shit-smeared sheets,
 Release a vow on my girl's behalf.
 For she vowed to holy Venus and Cupid
 That if I were restored to her
 And ceased to circulate torturous iambs
 She would give the choicest writings
 Of the very worst of poets to slow-footed Vulcan
 For burning in the merciless flames.
 And the very worst girl perceived she
 Was making this vow to the gods as a classy joke.
 So, goddess, born from the blue-green sea,
 Dweller of holy Idalium and exposed Uria
 And Ancona and reedy Cnidus
 And Amathus and Golgos
 And Dyrrachium, marketplace of the Adriatic,
 Receive the vow and see it is fulfilled
 If it is neither inelegant nor lacking in charm.
 Meanwhile, you, come forth to the flames,
 Full of rusticity and crudities,
Annals of Volusius, shit-smeared sheets.

XXXVII

Seedy inn and you, its motley crowd,
Nine pillars from the Brothers with traveller hats,
You think you are the only ones with cocks,
The only ones entitled to fuck this girl or that
And to think the rest of us billy goats?
Or, since a hundred or two hundred of you fools
Are forever sitting there do you think
I wouldn't dare to penetrate two hundred
Spectators at once?
Think again. For I will scrawl penises
All over the front of your inn.
For my girl, who fled my embrace,
Loved as much as no other girl will be loved,
For whom I fought great and glorious battles,
Sits in that very place. All you wellborn and wealthy men
Love her, and even – here's the shameful part –
All the insignificant and byway-seeking adulterers, too.
You, above all the others, one of the hairy ones,
Rabbity son of Spain,
Egnatius, who feigns nobility with a thick beard
And teeth brushed with Iberian urine.

XXXVIII

He is ailing, your Catullus, Cornificius,
He is ailing, god knows I am, and it's taking its toll,
Worse and worse, day and hour.
But have you relieved him with comforting words?
Though it would be very easy, no effort required.
I despair. Is this what I get for my affections?
Even a few comforting words might cheer me up,
Sadder than the tears of Simonides.

XXXIX

Egnatius. Because he has shining white teeth
 He beams wherever he goes. If a case comes
 To court and the orator causes eyes to water
 He is beaming. When mourners come to the pyre
 Of a dutiful son and a bereft mother weeps for her only
 child

He is beaming. Whatever the situation, wherever it is,
 Whatever he is doing, he is beaming. He has this disease,
 Neither refined in nature, I don't think, nor urbane.

So I must warn you, noble Egnatius,
 Even if you were from the city – either Sabine or
 Tiburtine –

Or a frugal Umbrian or obese Etruscan
 Or dark-skinned and toothy Lanuvian
 Or a Transpadane, to mention my own people, too,
 Or whoever else cleans their teeth properly,
 Even then, I wouldn't want you to beam wherever you go
 For nothing is more inappropriate than inappropriate
 laughter.

As it is you are Celtiberian, from Spain, and in the land
 of Iberia

Whatever a man pees he tends to brush
 His teeth and red-raw gums with in the morning,
 So the fact that your teeth are so polished confirms just
 this:

You have swallowed rather a lot of spent water.

XL

What malady of the mind, wretched little Ravidus,
Drives you headlong into my iambics?
Which god have you mindlessly invoked
To stir up the beginnings of a fevered brawl?
Or do you want to be on everyone's lips?
Do you long to be famous by whatever it takes?
You will be, since you have chosen to love my lover
Despite the long punishment that awaits.

XLI

Ameana, a girl fucked by everyone,
Demanded I pay her ten thousand sesterces –
That girl, the one with the rather repulsive nose,
Girlfriend of the bankrupt man of Formiae.
Those responsible for this girl, whoever you are,
Call friends and doctors,
The girl is not well and she's not inclined
To ask the bronze mirror what is wrong.

XLII

Come, hendecasyllables, all of you,
Whatever you number, anywhere.
A filthy slut thinks me a joke
And refuses to give me back our
Writing tablets, if you can bear to believe it.
Let's pursue her and demand them back.
Who is she, you ask? That one – you can see her
Strutting shamefully, laughing nastily as if
In a mime with a face like a Gallic puppy's.
Surround her, and demand them back,
'Filthy slut, give me back my writing tablets,
Give me back, filthy slut, my writing tablets!'
You won't do it for a penny. Oh the mire,
Oh the brothel, or what is worse if there can be worse!
But we shouldn't assume even this is sufficient.
If nothing else can be done, we shall make her
Iron-like dog face blush from top to chin.
Call her again in a louder voice,
'Filthy slut, give me back my writing tablets,
Give me back, filthy slut, my writing tablets!'
But we're making no headway, she's moved by nothing.
You must change tactics and approach
If you're going to get any further:
'Chaste and honest one, give me back my writing tablets!'

XLIII

Hello girl of not the smallest nose
Feet not beautiful, eyes not dark
Fingers not long, lips not dry
And certainly not too elegant of tongue,
Girlfriend of the bankrupt man of Formiae,
And the Province says that you are beautiful?
My Lesbia is compared with you?
Ignorant and dull-witted is our age.

XLIV

Dear country pile of mine, whether Sabine or Tiburtine –
For those whose hearts are set on not offending Catullus
Concur that you are Tiburtine; but those whose hearts
are set

On shaming him argue that you are Sabine.

But whether Sabine or more accurately Tiburtine,

I came gladly to your suburban dwelling

And threw off a nasty chest cough

Which my stomach gave me, not that it didn't deserve it

After it hungered for sumptuous dinners.

For as long as I wished to be a dinner guest of Sestius

I read his speech against Antius, the claimant,

Brimming as it was with poison and pestilence.

Hereupon a chill and cold and endless coughing

Shook me without respite until I escaped into your lap

And made myself better with rest and nettles.

So having recovered, I thank you profusely,

Because you have taken no action against me for my
mistake.

I have no objection now, if I lay my hands again on the
immoral

Writings of Sestius, that it's not me but Sestius himself

Who gets the filthy cold and cough,

Sestius, who invites me when I have read his bad book.

XLV

Holding his own Acme on his lap
 Septimius said, 'My Acme, if I am not hopelessly
 In love with you and ready to love
 You for all the years to come forever,
 As much as a man can love to the death,
 On my own in Libya or scorched India
 May I wrestle a lion with green eyes.'
 As he said this, Love sneezed his approval
 On the left before the right.

And Acme, tilting her head slightly
 And kissing with her rosy lips
 Her darling boyfriend's intoxicated eyes
 Said, 'My life, my darling Septimius,
 Let us be slaves forever to this master alone
 As much as a fire far stronger and fiercer
 Kindles in my soft marrow.'
 As she said this, Love sneezed his approval
 On the left before the right.

Enjoying today his good favour
 They love and are loved, their hearts as one.
 Poor Septimius prefers his one and only Acme
 To all the Syrias and Britains.
 Faithful Acme directs her affection and lust
 To Septimius alone.
 Who could envisage beings more fortunate,
 Who a love more blessed?

XLVI

Now spring brings back iceless warm fronts,
Now the unpredictability of an equinoctial sky
Falls silent beneath the West Wind's pleasant breeze.
Time to leave the fields of Troy, Catullus,
And the udder-rich plains of sweltering Nicaea.
Let us fly to the distinguished cities of Asia,
My mind is impatient and longing to wander now,
My happy feet grow lively at the thought of it now,
Goodbye, sweet crowd of friends, we set out
Together from home far away, but
Different and varied are the roads that carry us back.

XLVII

Porcius and little Socrates, two left hands
Of Piso, nuisance and famine of the world,
Does that erect Priapus favour you over
My dear Veranius and Fabullus,
Hosting sumptuous dinner parties
During the daytime, while my friends
Go in search of invitations at crossroads?

XLVIII

If someone allowed me forever to kiss
Your honeyed eyes, Juventius,
I would kiss you three hundred thousand times
And never seem sated,
Not even if the crop of our little kisses
Were thicker than dry corn.

XLIX

Marcus Tullius Cicero, most fluent
Of the grandsons of Romulus – all who are
And all who were and all who will be in years to come.
Catullus the very worst poet of all gives you his
Deepest thanks; as much the very worst poet of all
As you are the very best advocate of all.

L

Yesterday, Licinius, on a lazy day,
We messed around for ages in my writing tablets
Risqué as agreed,
Scribbling short verses, you then me,
Playing now with this metre and now with that,
Swapping them between us over laughter and wine.
And then I left, inflamed by your charm,
Licinius, and by your wit, so much so that
Neither food could relieve me of my misery
Nor gentle sleep drape my eyes,
But undone by passion I tossed and turned
All over the bed, anxious to see daylight
So I could speak with you and be with you.
But after my work-wearied limbs
Lay half dead on the bed
I wrote you this poem, wonderful man,
From which you may get a taste of my grief.
Now see that you're not too bold and, I beg you,
Don't shun my prayers, my darling,
Otherwise Nemesis might demand from you a penalty.
The goddess is violent, beware of causing her offence.

LI

That man seems to me to be a god
Or, forgive me, the gods' superior,
As he sits across from you and watches you
Endlessly, and hears
You sweetly laughing, which snatches every sense
From me, and I am lost: For as soon as I saw you,
Lesbia, nothing . . . is left for me [corruption in text]

. . .

But my tongue freezes, a gentle flame flows down
Under my limbs and my ears ring with their own sound.
Both my eyes are blinded by night.

Leisure, Catullus, is bad for you:
At leisure you are restless, too ill at ease.
Leisure has before now destroyed kings
And their wealthy cities.

LII

What reason is there, Catullus? Why delay dying?
That tumour Nonius sits on a magistrate's seat,
Vatinius swears by a consulship he does not have.
What reason is there, Catullus? Why delay dying?

LIII

I laughed at someone from the crowd just now
Who, when my dear Calvus had majestically
Laid out the case against Vatinius,
Said admiringly and raising his arms:
'Great gods, he's eloquent for a little man!'

LIV

Otho's head is exceptionally small,
Hirrius has the half-washed legs of a bumpkin,
Thin and whistling is Libo's gas,
If not with all the above, then I would hope to
Displease you with Sufficius, a rejuvenated old man . . .
You'll rage again at my innocent
Iambics, unparalleled commander.

LV

I beg you, if it's not too inconvenient,
To show me where your shady hiding places are.
I have searched for you on the smaller Campus,
I have searched for you in the Circus Maximus,
Among all the bookstalls, I have searched for you
In the holy temple of Greatest Jupiter.
I grabbed all the young girls, my friend,
Gathering in the colonnade of Pompey the Great,
But I saw that their faces were blank.
So I began to entreat them,
'You worst of girls, give me Camerius!'
One of them said, unveiling her naked flesh . . .
'Look, here he is, hiding between my rosy breasts.'
It has become a labour of Hercules to fetch you.
You deny us your company by such arrogance, my friend.
Tell us where you'll be in future, announce it
Boldly, be one with us, trust the light.
Are the milk-white girls holding you now in their embrace?
If you hold your tongue, keep your mouth shut,
You will dispose of all the rewards of love.
Venus revels in words, lots of words.
Alternatively, if you wish, shut your mouth,
But only if I can be privy to your affair.

(LVIIIb)¹³

Not even if I were modelled on the guard of Crete
Or Ladas the runner or feather-footed Perseus
Or carried on the wings of Pegasus,
Or the swift white chariot of Rhesus –
Add to this the feathery-footed flying birds,
And ask at the same time for the winds' blow –
You might put them all together, Camerius,
And give me use of them all, but even then, my friend,
I would be tired to the marrow and consumed
By my many exhaustive attempts at searching for you.

LVI

A ridiculous scenario, Cato, hilarious,
Well worth your attention and laughter.
Laugh as much as you love Catullus, Cato!
The scenario is ridiculous and too funny.
Just now I caught my girlfriend's little boy
Wanking; If Dione approves, I took him
With my hard-straining cock.

LVII

A beautiful meeting of shameful lovers,
Mamurra and penetrated Caesar.
It's no surprise: there are similar stains on both,
The one a City dye, the other Formiae,
Stamped on them and not removed.
Equally sickly, twins, the two of them,
Both delicately versed on one little bed,
One no more voracious an adulterer than the other,
Allied in their rivalry over little girls.
A beautiful meeting of shameful lovers.

LVIII

Caelius, our Lesbia, the Lesbia,
That Lesbia, whom Catullus loved alone
More than himself and all his family,
Now on crossroads and in alleys
Winks the descendants of great-hearted Remus.

LIX

Rufa from Bologna fellates Rufulus,
Often you've seen her in the cemeteries,
Menenius' wife, snatching dinner
From the very pyre, chasing after
Bread as it rolls off the fire –
She is banged by the half-shaven cremator.

LX

A lioness in the mountains of Libya
Must have delivered you, or a barking Scylla
From deep between her thighs, so hard-hearted and cruel
That you disregard the cry of a suppliant
In the fatal moment through a heart that is too fierce.

LXI

Dweller of Mount Helicon,
Son of Urania the Muse,
You tear the tender virgin away
To her husband, o Hymenae Hymen,
O Hymen Hymenae

Ring your temples with flowery
Garlands, sweetly fragrant with marjoram,
Take the yellow veil in happiness here
Come here, wearing saffron
Slippers on white soles

Woken by the happy day,
Singing wedding songs
In shrill little voice, pound ground
With your feet, with your hands
Shake the pine torch

For Junia comes to her Manlius
Like Idalium-dwelling Venus
To her Phrygian judge
Paris, with good fortune
A noble girl is wed

Like myrtle from Asia glistening
On branches of blossom
Which nymphs of the woods
Tend with dew drops
For their own pleasure

Come, then, make ready for the entrance,
Prepare to leave the Aeonian caves
In the cliffs of Thespia,

Which from above the nymph Aganippe
Waters with her chilly stream

And summon home the bride,
Eager for her new husband,
Entwining her heart with love
As the grasping ivy wraps itself
Around a tree without restraint

And you, virgins inviolate,
The same day approaches for you,
Come together, sing
In time, o Hymenaeae Hymen,
O Hymen Hymenaeae

So the more gladly, hearing
Himself summoned to his
Task, the chief of good Love
May approach, who conjugates
Honourable love.

Which god should lovers
In love seek more?
Which deity shall men worship more,
O Hymenaeae Hymen,
O Hymen Hymenaeae?

Fathers anxious for their children
Call upon you, virgins release
Their chastity belts for you,
With pricked up ears new husbands
Listen for you, anticipately

It is you who give a heavy-handed
Youth a delicate girl

Fresh from her mother's
Lap, o Hymenae Hymen,
O Hymen Hymenae

Without you Love can
Achieve nothing of which good rumour
Approves, but when you support it,
She can. Who would dare be compared
With this god?

Without you no house can
Make children; no parent depend
On offspring; but when you support it,
They can. Who would dare be compared
With this god?

Without you the land that
Lacks your worship cannot
Defend her borders: but can
When you support it. Who would dare
Be compared with this god?

Release the lock on the door,
The virgin is here. Do you see how
The torches toss their glittering hair?

. . .

. . .

. . .

. . .

Characteristic shame delays her.

The more she hears

She weeps because she must go.

Stop crying. You are in
 No danger Aurunculeia. No
 Lovelier woman than you
 Will have seen the clear day rising
 From the Ocean

You stand like a hyacinth
 Growing in a rich man's
 Colourful little garden.
 But you delay, the day is going.
 [Come forth, new bride]

Come forth, new bride,
 If now seems the right time, and hear
 Our words. Do you see? The torches
 Toss their golden hair:
 Come forth, new bride

Your husband is not changeable
 Or given to evil adultery
 In chase of shameful pursuits,
 He will not want to sleep apart
 From your delicate breasts

But like the heavy vine wraps
 Around the trees planted beside it
 He will be wrapped up
 In your embrace. But the day is going,
 Come forth, new bride

O bed, which by all . . .
 . . . [corruption in text] . . .

. . .

. . .

At the white foot of the wedding couch

How great the joys which
Are coming to your master,
How he'll rejoice in the wandering night
And middle of the day. But the day is going,
Come forth, new bride

Raise your torches, boys,
I see the yellow veil approaching.
Come sing in time,
'Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae'

May the saucy Fescennine jesting
Begin at last, and when he hears his love
For his master has been rejected, may the
Concubine not deny the
Boys their nuts

Give nuts to the boys, useless
Concubine! For long enough
You have played with the nuts: you
Must now serve Hymen,
Concubine, give them nuts

Today and yesterday, concubine,
Farm-stewards' wives were
Beneath your standards, but now
The barber trims your beard. Miserable
Miserable concubine, give them nuts

You may curse keeping
Your distance from your smooth-cheeked
Boys, perfumed groom, but keep away.
Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
[Io Hymen Hymenaeae]

We know you indulged in these
 Activities lawfully as a single man, but
 When married they are not permitted.
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae

Bride, you too be wary of denying
 What your husband seeks
 Lest he seek it elsewhere
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae

See how' strong and prosperous
 Your house is for you and your
 Husband! May it serve you
 (Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae)

Until white-haired old age
 Makes your head shake
 And nod approval to everything
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae

Lift your golden feet
 Over the threshold with good auspice
 And pass through the polished doorway.
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae

Look inside as your husband
 Reclines on a bed of Tyrian purple
 Waiting intently on just you.
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
 Io Hymen Hymenaeae

No less than you his flame
Burns in the depths of his heart
But his burns more deeply.
Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae

Release the young girl's
Shapely little arm, boy,
Now let her go to her husband's bed.
Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae

Noble women, married
To old men, prepare
The dear young girl.
Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae.

Now you may come, husband,
Your wife is in your bedchamber,
Her face shining like a little flower,
White chamomile
Or saffron poppy

And husband, gods help me
Please, you are no less beautiful,
Venus does not shun you,
But the day is going,
Go, do not delay

You delayed no more.
Now you enter. Kind Venus
Will help you, since what you
Desire you desire openly, and
Do not conceal your good love

He who wants to count
Your many thousand encounters
Would first enumerate the
Grains of dust in Africa
And gleaming stars ~

Make love as you please and give
Us children soon; it is not right for
So old a name to be
Without children, but to reproduce
On and on down the line

I want a little Torquatus
To stretch his delicate hands from
His mother's lap and to laugh
Sweetly to his father
From pursed lips

May he be like his father
Manlius and easily recognisable
As such to a stranger,
And may he reveal his mother's
Pureness in his face

Praise owed to so noble a
Mother will confirm his ancestry
Just as good repute abides
Telemachus born from the
August and unparalleled Penelope

Close the doors, virgins,
We have played enough. But
Noble husband and wife,
Live well and devote your youthful
Energies to the deed repeatedly.

LXII

Evening is here, young men, come rise, the long-awaited
 Evening Star only just projects its lights on high.
 Now is the time to rise, now, to leave the rich-laden tables,
 Now the virgin will arrive and the wedding hymn be sung.
 Hymen, o Hymenaeae, Hymen come, o Hymenaeae.

*Do you see the young men, maidens? Rise together, face them;
 The Evening Star exposes the mid-mountain fires,
 Yes, did you see how nimbly they jumped?
 They did not jump for nothing, their singing's worth seeing.
 Hymen, o Hymenaeae, Hymen come, o Hymenaeae.*

Gentlemen, we are not assured the victory palm,
 See how the maidens rehearse among themselves.
 They do not rehearse in vain: what they have is
 memorable,
 And no wonder since they strive with full intent;
 We divide our attention and divert our ears elsewhere.
 It's only right we are defeated, for victory adores focus.
 So come, now at least focus your minds.
 Soon they will start to sing, soon now you'll need to
 respond.
 Hymen, o Hymenaeae, Hymen come, o Hymenaeae.

*Hesperus, what crueller fire is carried in the sky?
 You can bear to tear a daughter from her mother's embrace,
 Can bear to tear a daughter as she clings to her mother's
 embrace
 And to give a pure girl to a fervid young man.
 What crueller act do enemies commit in a city they have
 captured?
 Hymen, o Hymenaeae, Hymen come, o Hymenaeae.*

Hesperus, what fire more pleasant shines in the sky?
 You can fortify with your flame the bond of marriage
 Which groom and parents pledge
 But not consummate before your heat is blazing.
 What is more desired from the gods than the happy hour?
 Hymen, o Hymenaeae, Hymen come, o Hymenaeae.

*Hesperus, Evening Star, has stolen one of us,
 Fellow maidens . . . [corruption in text] . . .*

. . .

. . .

. . .

. . .

For when you come the guard is always vigilant,
 At night the thieves hide, and often you turn back on them,
 Hesperus, you catch them as your name turns to Dawn.
 But the maidens love to carp at you in contrived complaint.
 But why, if they carp, do they seek you in the silence of
 their hearts?

Hymen, o Hymenaeae, Hymen come, o Hymenaeae.

As a hidden flower is born in a hedged garden,
 Unknown to the flock, mowed by no plough,
 A flower the breezes stroke, the sun fortifies, the rain
 feeds,

Which many boys, many girls desire;

When plucked by a tender hand it withers,

No boys, no girls, desire it,

So a virgin, while she remains untouched, is dear to her
 family;

But when she has lost her pure flower, her body tainted,
 She is no longer desirable to boys, no longer dear to girls.
 Hymen, o Hymenaeae, Hymen come, o Hymenaeae.

Like the unwed vine born on a fallow field,
 Who never lifts her head, never produces ripe grapes,
 But bowing her delicate body beneath her own weight
 Nearly, nearly, touches her topmost shoot to her root;
 No farmers, no bullocks have cultivated her,
 But if she were joined to an elm like a husband
 Many farmers, many bullocks, cultivate her,
 So a virgin, while she remains untouched, grows old while
 uncultivated.

When she enters a fair marriage at the age of maturity
 She is dearer to her husband and less hateful to her father.
 And do not fight with such a husband, maiden.

It is not fair to fight the man your own father bestowed
 you upon,

Your very father, with your mother, whom you must obey.
 Your virginity is not wholly yours, but part is your parents',
 A third your father's, a third is your mother's.
 A third alone is yours. Do not fight the two
 Who have given you lawfully with dowry to their
 son-in-law.

Hymen, o Hymenaeae, Hymen come, o Hymenaeae.

LXIII

Driven over high seas in a fast ship Attis
 Touched down in the Phrygian grove on quick keen foot
 And in woodland approached the goddess' haunts
 Veiled by shadow, summoned there in heightened frenzy,
 Drifting from his senses,
 He freed with sharp flint the weight from his groin.
 And when he felt his remaining limbs were male-free,
 Still soaking ground below with fresh blood,
 She took quickly in her pale hands a light drum –
 Your drum – Cybele, for your rites, mother,
 And tapping hollow bull hide with slender fingers
 Commenced with trembling voice her song to her
 companions:

'To the heights, Gallae, come together to Cybele's groves,
 Together come, Mistress of Dindymus' vagrant flock,
 Who like exiles sought places unknown
 As friends of mine and followers of my way
 And endured savage salt and wild sea
 And unmanned your bodies in deep hatred of Venus.
 Hearten the mind of your mistress by meandering quickly,
 Let the thought of dallying delay fade from your mind,
 together come
 Let us lead the way to the Phrygian home of Cybele,
 The goddess' Phrygian groves,
 Where cymbals cry and drums call back,
 Where Phrygian flautist plays profoundly on curved reed,
 Where ivy-bearing Maenads shake their heads wilfully
 And add encouragement to sacred rites with shrill
 ululations,
 Where that nomad troop of the goddess likes to flutter
 And where we should hasten with furious dancing.'

As soon as the counterfeit female Attis sang so to her
friends
Her throng suddenly cried with tongues which danced,
The light drum groaned back, the hollow cymbals called
back,
The quick chorus approached green Ida on feet that could
not wait.
Raging and gasping and drawing breath all at once Attis
led the way
To the accompaniment of drums in wandering the shadowy
groves
Like an untamed heifer avoiding the weight of the yoke,
The quick Gallae followed their fleet-footed leader.
And so when, quite exhausted, they reached Cybele's home
After much exertion they fell asleep without dinner,
Slow sleep, slipping languidly, covered their eyes.
Fervent fury abandons the mind in soft sleep.

But when the golden-faced Sun with eyes of rays
Surveyed the white sky, hard ground, wild sea,
And drove off night's shadows with lively loud feet
Sleep woke Attis there and fled quickly.
The goddess Pasithea welcomed Sleep in her trembling
bosom.
In the wake of quiet sleep and free from frenzied madness,
The moment Attis replayed in her mind what she had done
And clocked, clear-headed
Where she was
What she lacked
She made her way back to the shore again.
Her heart was rippling.
Watching, there, a desert of sea with tears in her eyes
She spoke to her country in a voice that was sad, miserable,
like this:
'Oh my country, my maker, my mother, my country oh

How rueful when I left you, as runaway slaves escape their
masters

So my feet took me to Mount Ida's groves,
To be mid-snow and ice-riven beast lairs
And to approach, quite witless, their dens in the shadows.

Where do I believe you lie, my country? Or on which
plots?

My very pupils burn to turn their gaze to you
While for sharp season my mind is free of rabidity.
Am I to be uprooted from my home to these backwoods?
Am I to retire from my country, possessions, friends,
parents?

Am I to retire from the forum, palaestra, racecourse, gym?
Helpless, helpless, heart, more, more, must you weep.

For what shape or form have I not been at one with?

A woman now, pubescent, young man, boy
I blossomed at the gym; I was the fat in the olive oil;

My doorways were busy, my porch was warm,

My house was decked with plaits of flowers

When it was time to leave my bed at dawn.

Must I wait today on the gods and suffer in Cybele's
service?

A priestess, me, a part of myself, a seedless man, shall I
be?

Am I to garden the frozen snow-cuddled soils of green Ida?

Live my life beneath the tall pillars of Phrygia

Where deer farm forest, where boar gad grove?

Now, now, I regret what I did. Now, now, and I grieve.'

When this sound rushed from her rosy lips
Relaying unprecedented news to the twin ears of the gods
Cybele at once released the yoke from her lions
And goading the enemy of the flock to her left, says this:

‘Onwards,’ she said, ‘Go Fierce One, see that fury drives
him on,
Let him be struck by the blow of madness and return to
the groves,
Since he so obviously desires to elude my authority,
Come whip your back with your tail, suffer your own
lashes,
See everywhere resound with bellow and roar,
Toss the ruddy mane on your taut neck.’
So spoke fearsome Cybele and loosed the yoke with her
hand.
Roused, the beast incites himself to speed,
Roams, roars, tramples the vegetation with ranging paw.
And when he approaches the damp ground on the
whitening shore
And sees delicate Attis near the marble sea
He makes his attack. She, out of her wits, flees into the
wild grove;
There she spent all the rest of her life as a servant to the
goddess.

Goddess, great goddess, Cybele, goddess mistress of
Dindymus,
May all your madness be far from my home, Mistress,
Urge, incite others, drive others to madness.

LXIV

They say that pines were born long ago
From the head of Mount Pelion in Thessaly
And swam the sea, its undulating waves
To Phasis, pheasant river, and
The land of Aeetes the king
As young men, plucked from the
Flower of Greek youth in a mission
To steal the golden fleece
Of Colchis
Dared to skim with speeding stern
The salt sea,
Sweeping turquoise waters
With oars upturned like hands.

Divine Minerva, her keep a citadel
In the city's heights
Streamlined the flying chariot to the breeze
Herself, weaving, joining the pines together
To form a curving keel.
She, the ship, inured the innocent sea
To the flight of ships.
No sooner had she torn the capricious membrane
With her beak and with a twist of the oar
Turned the waters white with foam
Than from the whitening whirlpool there emerged
The unpainted faces
Of nymphs glistening in brine and gazing
In wonder at so novel a contraption.

On that day and no other men
Watched keen-eyed – they were human –
The naked bodies of nymphs
Rise until their breasts were free of the eddying white.

Then Peleus is said to have burned in love for Thetis.
Then nymph Thetis did not disparage a wedding to a
mortal.

Then father Jupiter himself felt that Peleus ought
To be joined to Thetis in matrimony.

Heroes, born in the moment most admired
Beyond measure of all Ages, godly race,
Offspring of a noble mother,
Again and again I beseech you.
I shall commemorate you often in my poem,
Especially you Peleus, stalwart of Thessaly,
Raised to the stars by so prosperous a match. For Jupiter,
Jupiter, father of the gods, gave up his love to you.
Did nymph Thetis bewitch you with her beauty?
Did Tethys truly allow you to wed her granddaughter
And Ocean, too, her husband
Who envelops the whole world in sea?

Dawn came in a moment many times imagined and
All Thessaly flocked to her home as one.
The palace was filled
With the jubilant crowd who held gifts before their faces
And faces expressing joy.
Cieros was deserted, Phthian Tempe left behind,
The houses of Crannon, the walls of Larisa, empty;
They convened at Pharsalus, to Pharsalus and its homes
They flocked. No one tended the fields. The necks
Of bullocks grew soft through inactivity,
No curved scythe cleansed the soil beneath the vine,
No bull stooped beneath the yoke to cleave the earth,
No hook pruned the shade from the leaves of the trees,
Decay and rust overran the abandoned ploughshares.
But the house receded every which way
In regal opulence, and sparkled and glimmered

With gold and silver.

Ivory glinted off thrones, cups dazzled off tables,
The whole household delighted in the lustre of
Royal treasure.

Observe the couch at the heart of the palace,
A fine seat for a goddess,
Finished with ivory from India
And spread with purple tinged with the rose-pink
Dye of the murex fish.
This bedspread,
Embroidered with the shapes of men
Who lived long ago, unveils the virtues of heroes
Through the miracle of art.

Looking out from it
On the quietly shifting shore of Naxos
Ariadne watches Theseus
Fading with fast fleet and bears at heart
Fears she cannot temper.
Not yet does she believe she is seeing
What she is seeing,
Barely woken from sleep that deceived
To discover she is abandoned
And pitiful and alone on lonely sands.
But the young man is forgetful and fleeing
And pushes the waves away with oars,
Leaving his promises unfulfilled to the tempest that is
stirring.

From afar atop the seaweed, with sad little eyes,
The daughter of Minos watches, ah she watches,
Him, like a stone sculpture of a bacchant.
She ebbs on currents swollen with pain,
Losing hold

On the fine band on her fair head
And the cloth that envelops her body in a gentle clinch
And the rounded bra that bounds her milky breasts.
All the coverings which have fallen from her body every-
where
The salt waves make sport of at her feet.
But neither headband nor fluttering veils vexed her
When in the fullness of her heart
She was missing you, Theseus,
With her every thought, in the fullness of her heart
Clinging to you, completely lost.

Poor girl, how Venus felled her with never-ending grief,
Sowing thorny worries in her heart
From the moment Theseus determined
A departure from the port of Piraeus on Athens' arced
shore
And reached the palace of the unjust king of Crete.
For they say that Athens, plagued by damnation
To pay the penalty for the murder of Androgeos,
Would at one time provide its pick of youths
And glory of maidens as a feast for the Minotaur.
The fledgling city was suffering the consequences
When Theseus chose to yield his own body
For precious Athens so the living dead of Cecrops
Should not be carried to such deaths in Crete.

And so he put his trust in a light ship and gentle breeze
And came before haughty Minos
And his magnificent enclosure.
The moment the virgin princess clapped her
Widening eyes upon him –
Her pure little bed was still protecting her in a soft
And motherly embrace, breathing sweetly
Over her the fragrant breath

Of myrtle such as the River Eurotas puts forth
 Or the breeze spring plucks from flowers of many colours –
 And averted her hot eyes from him only when
 Her whole body had caught the flame of love
 And she burned deep inside to the depths of her marrow.

Wretchedly rousing passions in his cruel heart,
 Divine Cupid, weaver of joys with worries among men,
 And Venus, ruler of the Golgians and leafy Idalium.
 On what waves you inflamed the girl, threw her
 From her wits, as she sighed for her fair guest
 With **breath upon breath**.

How huge the fears she carried in her wearied heart.
 How many times she paled beyond gleaming gold,
 When putting his mind to conquering the savage monster
 Theseus sought either death or the fruits of glory.
 Promising little gifts to the gods that were not unwelcome
 But futile nonetheless, she mouthed vows silently.

Like an oak tree or cone-bearing pine with seeping bark
 Shaking its branches on the heights of Mount Taurus
 Whose twisting trunk a storm uproots in a flash –
 And the tree, torn from the roots,
 Falls prostrate and far
 Breaking whatever lies in its broad path –
 So Theseus laid the beast low, conquering its force
 While it tossed its horns ineffectually to the empty breeze.
 From there and high on glory the stranger retraced his
 path,
 Steering his wandering course with the delicate thread
 So the deception of the enclosure should not defeat him
 As he departed from meandering turns of the labyrinth.

But come, I digress from my primary song,
 Recollecting further how the girl departed

From the face of her father, the embrace of her sister,
And finally her mother, who tried wretchedly
To feel happy for her lost daughter, who put above
Them all her sweet love for Theseus;
Or how she came to the foaming shore of Naxos
By boat; or how her partner abandoned her as she
Was buried in sleep, sailing away,
Forgetful through and through.

They say that, raging in the passion in her heart,
She would release deeply felt and audible words,
Then climbed the steep mountains in sadness
To extend from there her view over the vast swell
Of sea, then sallied forth into the salt waves
Dancing before her and raising her soft clothes
To bear her calves, uttered in sorrow these final complaints,
Preparing cold little sobs on wet lips:

‘Was it for this I was taken from my father’s hearth,
 traitor,
For you to leave me on an empty shore, traitor, Theseus?
So you leave me, heedless of the gods’ authority,
Forgetful, ah. Do you carry home your perjured vows?
Could nothing alter the intention in your cruel mind?
Could there be no mercy to tempt you to take
Pity on me for all your hardness of heart?
These were not the promises you once made
Me in a warming tone, these are not what you bade
My wretchedness to hope for, but a happy marriage,
Longed-for wedding songs, everything
The wandering breezes have scattered vain.

May no woman now believe a man when he makes a
 promise,
May no woman hope the words of her man are true.

While their minds are desirous, desperate to obtain something,
 They are afraid of swearing nothing,
 There is nothing they won't promise.
 But as soon as the lust in their desirous minds is sated,
 They remember none of their words,
 Have no fear of perjury.

There's no doubt I seized you as you tossed
 Mid death throes, and more than that I elected to lose
 My half-brother rather than fail you,
 Deceitful man, in your final hour.
 For that I am to be torn apart by beasts and given to birds
 As prey – and no mound of earth will be piled upon my
 corpse.
 What kind of lioness bore you beneath a lonely rock,
 What sea conceived you and spat you out from its foaming
 waves,
 What Syrtis, what fierce Scylla, what monstrous
 Charybdis,
 You, who offer such returns for your sweet life?

If a marriage to me was not in your heart
 Because you feared the savage reprimands of your aged
 father
 You might still have led me to your home
 To be a slave to you in a joyous labour,
 Washing your white feet with pure water,
 Spreading your bed with a purple bedspread.

But I have been felled by trouble so why pile
 Fruitless complaints on the dumb winds which lack
 The feelings to hear
 My words and respond in kind?
 He is almost mid ocean now,

No human shape is visible on dull seaweed.
So far does cruel fate mock me in my desperate
Times and begrudge even ears to my complaints.

All-powerful Jupiter, I wish the ships of Cecrops
Had not touched the shores of Cnossos in the first place,
That the traitor, bringing a gruesome tribute to
The ungovernable bull, had not tethered his ship in Crete,
That the evil man did not hide his cruel plans
Behind a handsome exterior
And stay here as a guest in our home.
For where can I take myself now?
What kind of hope can I cling to? I am lost.
Shall I make for the mountains of Ida?
But the savage sea divides, separates me
From them, swirling far and wide.
Or should I expect my father to help me?
Did I not leave him as I pursued a young man
Spattered with my brother's blood?
Or should I console myself
With the loyalty and love of a husband,
A man who flees, bending heavy oars in the swirling sea?
Worse, I am on a lonely island, a shore with no shelter,
And no way out reveals itself on the circling waves of
water.

There is no means of escape, no hope. Everything is silent,
Everything deserted; everything points to death.

But my eyes will not fall shut on me in death,
My senses will not leave my wearied body
Until I demand from the gods rich justice for my betrayal
And in my final hour pray for the loyalty of the gods.

So Eumenides, punishers and avengers of the crimes
Of men, your forehead, fringed with snaky hair,

Exposing the anger exhaled from your chest,
 Here, come here, hear my complaints,
 Which I am forced in my wretched helplessness
 To pour from the depths of my marrow, blazing,
 Blinded by mindless madness.
 As these truths are born from the bottom of my heart
 Please do not allow my grief to turn to dust,
 But with the kind of heart Theseus had when he left me,
 Goddesses, may he destroy himself and his family.'

After she poured these words from her sad breast,
 Troubled, demanding punishment for wicked deeds,
 The ruler of the gods
 Whose authority goes unchallenged
 Nodded his agreement,
 At the movement of which the
 Earth and choppy seas trembled
 And the firmament shook its gleaming stars.

But as for Theseus, his mind gripped by murky darkness,
 He released from his forgetful heart all the instructions
 Which hitherto he was guarding permanently in his mind,
 Nor raising the sweet signs to his sad father
 Did he show that he had seen the port of Athens safely.
 For they say that once, when Aegeus entrusted his son
 To the winds as he left the goddess' walls in his ship,
 He embraced the young man and gave him these
 instructions:

'My only son, dearer to me than life's length,
 Son, whom I am forced to send into an uncertain situation,
 Returned to me only recently at the height of my old age,
 Since my fate and your determined virtue snatch you
 Away from me against my will, though my tired eyes are
 Not yet drunk with the dear shape of my son,

I shall not send you rejoicing with a happy heart
Or allow you to carry the signs of good fortune,
But first I shall free my heart of countless laments,
And pour soil over my white hair and defile it with ash,
Then hang dyed sails from my bending mast
So that sails dipped in Iberian rust may proclaim
This grief of mine, this blaze in my head.

But if Minerva of sacred Itonus, who agreed to defend our
race

And the seat of Erechtheus, allows you to sprinkle your
Right hand with the blood of the bull,
Then see that these commands endure,
Kept safe in your remembering heart –
May no time erase them.

As soon as your eyes light upon our hills
Drop each black cloth from the yards
And let your twisted ropes hoist white sails
So as soon as possible I may see them and know
True happiness in my heart, as the blessed
Hour brings you back to me.'

These instructions, which until now Theseus was holding
Constantly in his thoughts, seeped away
Like clouds struck by a blast of wind
From the high summit of a snowy mountain.
But his father, as he sought a view from the top of the
citadel,

Spilt a flood of tears from his anxious eyes
As soon as he caught sight of the billowing sails,
And threw himself headlong from the top
Of the cliffs

Assuming Theseus lost to cruel fate.
So savage Theseus entered a household
Decked in mourning for his father's death

And caught the same sort of grief
 He had imposed on the daughter of Minos
 Through the neglectfulness of his heart.

Then she, watching in her sorrow his ship
 Disappearing, drifted from one worry
 To another in her wounded heart.

But from another part of the cloth
 Flew in vigorous Bacchus
 With his throng of Satyrs and Silenes from Nysa,
 Seeking you, Ariadne, burning in love for you.
 His followers were raging all over, out of their wits.
 'Euhoe!' bacchantes tossing their heads with cries 'Euhoe!'
 One section were shaking sticks with covered tips,
 Another were hurling the limbs of a dismembered bullock,
 Others were dressing themselves in plaits of snakes,
 Others were gathering in worship of sacraments
 Concealed in hollow baskets,
 Rites which the profane long to hear, but in vain.
 Others were patting drums with outstretched palms,
 Or causing round cymbal tin to sing and ring,
 Many had horns which blew booming booms
 And the Phrygian flute shrieked in shrill song.

The bedspread, richly embroidered with shapes like these,
 Embraced the wedding bed with its own covering.

When the youth of Thessaly had gazed at it eagerly
 Enough they began to make way for the blessed gods.
 Here, just as the shivering West Wind wakes the curving
 Waves in the early morning with its gust across the calm sea,
 While Aurora rises towards the course of wandering Sun,
 And at first the waves progress slowly, hit by a gentle
 breeze,

And resonate with a ripple of little laughter,
Then as the wind builds up they grow larger and larger,
And reflect the light as they swim away from purple dawn,
So then in the atrium the guests left the royal palace
On wandering feet and made their own way home.

The first to arrive after they left was Chiron
From the peak of Pelion, carrying woodland gifts:
All the plains bear, all Thessaly
Grows on her high mountains,
All the flowers the life-giving breeze of the
Warm West Wind nourishes near the stream,
He arranged them all in assorted garlands,
Struck by the pleasant scent of which the household
smiled.

On his heels Penios the river god came from green Tempe,
Tempe, which hanging woods fringe from above,
. . . [corruption in text] . . . leaving to celebrate their
dancing.

And not without gifts: for he brought tall beeches with
Their roots and straight-trunked laurel sky-reaching
And nodding plane and the pliant sister
Of fire-consumed Phaethon and airy cypress.
He positioned them all around the palace
Intermingled so the hall would grow green
Decked with soft foliage.

Ingenious Prometheus followed behind him,
Wearing faded scars of his former punishment,
Which once he paid, his limbs tied
To a rock by chains
As he hung from a sheer cliff face.

Then the father of the gods arrived with his blessed wife
 And children, leaving in the heavens only you
 Phoebus Apollo, with your twin
 Who tends the mountains of Idrus:
 For you and your sister were united in despising Peleus,
 And recoiled from lighting wedding flames for Thetis.

After the gods moulded their limbs to white seats
 At tables laden generously with all sorts of dishes
 With bodies trembling in unsteady gait
 The Fates began to sing their prophetic song.

A white shawl swamped their trembling body
 And covered their ankles with its purple border;
 Pink headbands rested upon their white head
 And their hands plucked dutifully
 At a task that lasts forever.
 The left hand was holding a distaff
 Wrapped in soft wool. Drawing the threads gently
 The right shaped them with upturned fingers,
 Twisting them under the thumb and turning
 The weighted spindle with smooth handle,
 And a tooth was ever plucking to make the weaving
 Even, and pieces of wool which obtruded before
 From the light threads dangled from their dry withered
 lips,
 And in front of their feet they were guarding
 Soft fleeces of shining wool in little twig-lined baskets.
 And plucking the fleeces with a voice of precision
 They poured forth what was fated in divine song,
 Song no age thereafter could allege was false:

‘Defence of Thessaly, enriching your magnificence with
 Virtues great, dearest to Jupiter son of Ops,

Hear what the Sisters reveal to you in happy light,
An accurate oracle: but you, the fates follow,
Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

The Evening Star will come to you
Bringing what grooms long for,
Come will the wife beneath a well-omened star
To pour out her heart to you with love to distraction,
Ready to languish with you in sleep you share,
Spreading her gentle arms beneath your strong neck.
Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

No house has ever sheltered love like this,
No love has joined lovers in such a pact as
Lives in the harmony of Thetis and Peleus.
Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

Achilles will be born to you, a fearless man,
Known to the enemy not by back but by brave chest,
Ever the victor in the cross-country race,
He will outstrip the fire-quick footsteps of swift deer.
Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

There's not a hero who will compare with him in battle
When the Trojan plains grow wet with Greek blood
And Agamemnon, third heir of treacherous Pelops,
Besieges and lays waste to the walls of Troy
In protracted war.
Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

Time and again mothers will speak of his unequalled virtues
And distinguished deeds at the funerals of their sons
As they release unwashed hair from their white crowns
And bruise aged breasts with weak hands.
Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

For as a reaper picks thick bundles of corn
 Beneath the blazing sun and harvests the blond fields,
 So he will lay low the bodies of the Troy-born
 With unforgiving iron.

Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

The River Scamander will witness his great virtues
 As it flows in profusion from the rapid Hellespont
 And its passage grows narrow through the
 Slaughtered bodies that mount up and
 Warms its deep waters with indiscriminate blood.

Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

The final witness will be the booty paid for with death
 When a rounded tomb heaped upon
 A high rampart receives the white limbs
 Of a virgin slain.

Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

For the moment fate surrenders power
 To wearied Greeks, releasing Neptune's bonds
 On the city of Dardanus,
 The high tomb will grow wet with Polyxena's blood,
 As like a sacrificial victim falling beneath the ready knife,
 She throws down her headless body as her knees give way.

Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

So come, unite the lovers in the love they have longed for,
 May the husband welcome his goddess in happy contract
 And the bride be given to her eager husband at last.

Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.

Returning at the rise of dawn her nurse
 Will not be able to encircle her neck with yesterday's
 ribbon,

Nor her worrying mother, sad for a difficult daughter
Who sleeps alone, lose hope for dear grandchildren.

Run on, drawing out the weft, run on, spindles.'

With predictions like these the Fates once sang
From the divinity of their heart a felicitous song for Peleus.

For the sky-lying gods used to visit the unblemished
Homes of heroes in the past in person

And show themselves in the assemblies of men

When piety was yet to be broken.

Calling upon the shining temples

When the annual rites of festival days arrived

The father of the gods would watch one hundred

Bulls fall prostrate in sacrifice.

Often wayfaring Bacchus led from the high summit

Of Parnassus his Euhoe-crying, wild-hair flowing

Bacchantes, when all of Delphi rushed from the city at
once

To welcome the god, rejoicing, with smoking altars.

Often in the death-dealing struggle of war Mars

Or Minerva, mistress of rapid Triton

Or Nemesis Ramnusian virgin

Stood beside armed soldiers

And gave the bands their encouragement.

But after the earth was infected with unspeakable crime

And everyone put justice to flight from his grasping mind,

Brother drenched hands in the blood of brother,

Son ceased to grieve for the death of father and mother,

Father longed for the premature death of his son

So freely he could get purchase on the flower of a new
wife,

Mother lay herself down beneath her naïve son,

Wrongful and unafraid of doing sacrilege to her household
gods –

All things speakable and unspeakable, muddled together in
evil fury,

Have turned the just minds of our gods away from us.

So they do not dignify our assemblies with their presence,

Or even bear to touch the clear light of day.

LXV

Drained as I am by a grief that never ends,
 Anxiety, Hortalus, calls me away from the versed
 virgins –
 The pulse in my mind lacks the strength to quench the
 sweet fruit
 Of the Muses as it buoys on agonies so great.
 For recently in the swirling Lethe the flowing tides
 Stroked the paling feet of my brother,
 He the land of Troy buried beneath the Rhoetean shore,
 Stolen from my eyes . . .
 . . . [corruption in text] . . .
 A brother sweeter than life, I, you,
 Will I never look at you again after this?
 There is no doubt I will always love you, though,
 Always sing sorrowful songs of your death,
 As Daulias sang through the impenetrable shadows
 Of branches as she grieved for the fate of Itylus who
 died –
 But all the same, in grief as deep as this, Hortalus, I send
 This poem I translated for you from Callimachus
 In case you should think that your words have flowed
 From my mind, given to the empty breezes for nothing,
 As an apple, a secret gift sent to a bride,
 Falls from the chaste lap of the virgin,
 Placed there beneath the poor forgetful girl's soft clothing
 Until she springs up at her mother's approach, it is
 shaken out,
 And sent rolling straight to the ground,
 And a guilty blush drenches her sorrowful face.

LXVI

The man who studied all the lights of our great earth,
 Who understood the rise and fall of stars,
 How the fiery glow of our swift sun is eclipsed,
 How stars fade at established hours,
 How sweet love furtively draws the Moon
 From her airy orbit and hides her beneath the rocks of
 Latmus:
 He, Conon, saw me shining brightly on the edge of heaven,
 A luscious lock from the head of Berenice,
 Whom she pledged to many goddesses,
 Extending her slim arms, when
 The king, enriched though he was by his new marriage,
 Set out to plunder the territory of the Syrians,
 Wearing sweet traces of bedroom brawls
 Which he acquired from his virginal rewards.
 Is Love so hateful to new brides? Or are the joys
 Of parents rendered void by the forced tears
 They pour so profusely on the bedchamber's threshold?
 They do not, gods help me, go sighing from the heart.
 With her many complaints my queen taught me that,
 When her new husband sallied into savage battle.
 But it was not an empty bed you mourned, was it,
 But the tearful separation from a brother who was dear?
 How anxiety consumed you to the depths of your sad
 marrow!
 How the fears that filled your heart divorced
 Your mind from your senses! But I for one
 Realised you were great-hearted even as a young virgin.
 Or have you forgotten the good deed by which you
 obtained
 A royal husband, a deed no one stronger dared?
 But then, what sad words you spoke as you bade your
 husband

Farewell. Jupiter, how often you wiped your sad eyes!
 Who is the great god that changed you? Or is it that lovers
 Do not want to be long parted from beloved flesh?
 And there you vowed me to all the gods in exchange for
 your

Sweet husband, with bull blood too,
 If he should return. He did not take long
 To capture Asia and add it to the territory of Egypt.
 So for these accomplishments I release the former vows
 Made to the divine assembly in exchange for a new gift.
 Unwillingly, queen, I was felled from your head,
 Unwillingly, I swear by you and your head,
 A worthy oath: if anyone idly invokes it let him suffer.
 But who could claim he was a match for iron?
 Even the mountain was uprooted, the tallest on the coast
 That Sun, bright child of Thia, chariots over,
 Since the Persians created a new sea and barbarian
 Youth sailed through the midst of Mount Athos in their
 fleet.

What can hair do, when such mountains yield to iron?
 Jupiter, curse be on the whole tribe of Iron Workers
 And the man who first initiated the search beneath the
 ground

For metal and grazed what is hard with iron.
 Severed a little earlier my sisters were mourning
 My fate when the winged horse of Locrian Arsinoe,
 The brother of Ethiopian Memnon, rode
 Through the air, beating it with nodding wings,
 Lifted me up and flew me through the night skies
 And laid me in the chaste lap of Venus.
 Arsinoe herself, a Greek living on the shores of Canopus,
 Dispatched the West Wind's own attendant to the deed,
 Then, so the golden crown from Ariadne's forehead
 Should not be set alone on the colourful

Periphery of the sky, but that I might shine too,
 The loyal spoils of a blonde head,
 Venus placed me, a little wet from the waves as I travelled
 To the temples of the gods, as a newby among the
 ancient stars.

For grazing the stars of Virgo and savage
 Leo, adjoining the Bear Callisto daughter of Lycaon,
 I turn to the west, ahead of slow Bootes,

Who only just succeeds in sinking into deep Ocean;
 But while the feet of the gods trample me by night,
 Dawn restores me to white-haired Tethys.

(May I speak with your compliance, virgin Nemesis,
 For I will not conceal the truth through any fear,
 Not even if the stars tear me to pieces for my hostile
 words –

I shall uncover what is hidden in my honest heart),
 I am not rejoicing at this situation as much as being
 tortured

At being forever parted from my mistress' head.
 While once she was a virgin she had no share of perfumes,
 But I absorbed many cheap ones.

The torch weds you with the light you have longed for,
 But do not uncover your breasts, lay your clothes aside,
 And give your bodies to be united in sex

Until the pleasant present of onyx delights me,
 Your onyx, you who cherish with marriage the chaste bed,
 But may the woman who gave herself to filthy adultery
 Swallow evil libations and render them worthless in the
 light dust.

For I seek no rewards from the unworthy.
 But rather, brides, may harmony always attend your
 Houses, may lasting love do the same.

As for you, my queen, when you see your constellation
 As you worship divine Venus with festival lights,

Do not let me be without your perfumes,
But furnish me with more splendid gifts
So the stars may repeat, 'If only I could become
Royal hair! And may Orion shine near Aquarius.'

LXVII

You're a thrill to a husband and father, sweet
 Door, may Jupiter raise your fortunes!
 They say you were an obedient servant to Balbus
 Once, when the old man held sway in this house,
 But a bad servant to his son, they say, after
 The marriage and the old man lay on his bier.
 Tell us, come, why you're said to have changed,
 To have dropped the faith you kept with your old
 master.

*'It's not my fault (I hope to impress Caecilius, I am now in
 His charge), although they say it is my fault –
 No one can honestly say I've done anything wrong.
 It's true what people tell you – blame the door [line
 partly corrupt]
 Whenever some crime is discovered
 Everyone shouts at me: "Door, it's your fault!"*

It's not enough for you to say it with a single word,
 No, you must do it so someone believes you and
 Sees it for himself.

'How can I? No one even asks or tries to find out.'

We want to know. Don't hesitate to tell us.

*'Very well, first of all, as for the fact that a virgin was
 entrusted to me –
 It's false. Her previous husband did not touch her;
 His little sword dangling more flaccid than a delicate beet
 Never raised itself to the centre of his tunic;
 But his father is said to have dishonoured his own son's bed*

*And polluted the wretched household,
Either because his sullied thoughts blazed in blind lust
Or because his son was impotent, had sterile seed,
So someone more vigorous had to be sought
Who could loosen her virginal belt.'*

You tell of a superlative father, his devotion quite
wondrous,
A man who came in his own son's lap.

*'And settled beneath the watch-tower of Cycnus, Brixia,
Which the delicate stream of golden Mella permeates,
Brixia beloved mother of my Verona,
Says he is not the only one to have known her either,
But speaks of the love of Postumius and Cornelius,
With whom she committed the evil that is adultery.
Suppose someone responds: How do you know? You, door,
Are never allowed to leave your master's threshold
Or to listen to people, but attached here to a little beam
You merely open and close the house.*

*Well, often I have heard her talking alone in a whisper
With her slave girls about these shameful liaisons
Of hers, naming those men I mentioned, seeing as she would
Not expect me to have a tongue or ears.
What's more, she added to the list someone else, whom I am
Unwilling to name in case he raises his red eyebrows.
The man is tall and once carried a big lawsuit
About a false pregnancy in a lying womb.'*

LXVIII

Yes, you are burdened by fate and bitter circumstance,
 But the fact you send me this little letter, tear-written,
 Hopeful I might lift you from your shipwreck, your thrall
 To the sea's foaming waves, might rescue you from
 Death's threshold, as holy Venus permits you
 No calming sleep, abandoned on a bed, bereft,
 The Muses no distraction with sweet song of
 Classic writers so long as the troubled mind wakes,
 It makes me grateful: you call me your friend
 And seek me as the fount of gifts of Muse and Venus.
 But in case my misfortunes are news to you, Manlius,
 And so you don't feel I shirk the obligations owed a host,
 Hear how I too am drowned in the waves of fate
 So you ask no more a sad man for gifts of happiness.
 From the time the pure toga was first put upon me,
 When the bloom of my youth enjoyed its pleasant spring,
 I sported hard enough. I was no stranger to the goddess
 Who mixes sweet bitterness with love's woe,
 But the death of my brother and ensuing grief has stolen
 From me all enthusiasm for it. Ah poor brother, stolen
 from me,
 By dying you have splintered my happiness, brother,
 With you our whole household has been buried,
 With you all our joys have perished together,
 Joys which your sweet love encouraged in life.
 Upon his death I banished these pursuits from my
 Every thought, and all the pleasures my spirit indulged
 too,
 So when you come to write 'It is shameful to be at Verona,
 Catullus, when this man, one of the better sort,
 Warms his chilly limbs in the bed you left behind,'
 That, Manlius, is more than shameful, it's pathetic.

So you will forgive me if I do not grant you these gifts
 Which grief stole from me – since I cannot.
 The reason is I do not have a great collection of scrolls
 With me here since I live at Rome; that is my home,
 That is where I base myself; it is there I pluck the years;
 Just one crate of many followed me here.
 Since this is how it is I would not want you to think I act
 From malice or too disingenuous a mind
 So neither of your demands enjoys tangible returns.
 I would confer them heartily, if only I had them.

I cannot remain silent, goddesses, about how
 Allius helped me, the great service he performed,
 For fear time, flying over the ages of forgetfulness,
 Will veil with blind night this endeavour of his.
 I shall tell you, but I ask that you tell many thousands
 In turn and make this manuscript speak in old age.
 . . . [corruption in text] . . .

And in death may his fame grow more and more,
 If only no spider spinning thin web on the ceiling
 completes

Her work over Allius' name and renders it obscure.
 For you know what trouble duplicitous Venus
 Gave me, how she burned me

As I blazed as much as Trinacrian Etna

And the waters of Malis in Oetean Thermopylae,
 And my sad eyes melted and melted in continual weeping,
 My cheeks drenched with rain showers of sorrow.
 Just as on the pinnacle of an air-lying mountain a sparkling
 Stream launches itself off moss-covered rock,
 And rolls unstoppably from the vertical ravine,
 And feeds its way through the middle of a deep crowd,
 Sweet respite for a traveller, wearied and perspiring,
 When oppressive heat makes the scorched fields gape,

And as a favouring breeze arrives and gently exhales
 Upon sailors caught in a black hurricane,
 An answer to their prayers to Pollux and Castor,
 So was the help of Allius to me.
 He flung wide open a door closed before,
 And he gave a house to me and my mistress
 Where we could exercise our mutual passion,
 Where my shining goddess with gentle footsteps
 Approached and rested her shining sole on
 Worn threshold and faltered with her creaking sandal,
 Just as once, blazing in love for her husband,
 Laodamia came to the house of Protesilaos,
 A home begun in vain; not yet had beast of sacrifice
 Appeased the heavenly gods with holy blood.
 I hope I never desire anything so much, Ramnusian Virgin,
 That I undertake it rashly without the will of the gods.
 Laodamia learned how much the thirsty altar longs
 For the blood of the devoted through the loss of her
 man,
 Forced as she was to release her grip on her new husband's
 Neck before the coming of one winter and another
 Had quenched love's thirst over long nights
 So she could live on despite the rupture of her marriage
 Which the Fates knew was not far off
 If Protesilaos went as a soldier to the walls of Troy.
 It was at the time when Helen had been captured and Troy
 Began to fire up the foremost men of Greece,
 Troy (Unspeakable!) common grave of Asia and Europe,
 Troy, bitter ash of men and each last virtue,
 Did she also bring wretched death to my brother?
 Ah poor brother, stolen from me,
 Pitiable brother, ah, stolen from the pleasant light,
 With you our whole household has been buried,
 With you all our joys have perished together,

Joys which your sweet love encouraged in life.
 Laid to rest now so far away, not among familiar graves,
 Not near the ashes of relatives,
 Terrible Troy, ill-fated Troy, holds your tomb
 In foreign soil in a distant land.
 Hastening there, the choice youth of all Greece are
 Said then to have left their familiar hearths
 To stop Paris gasconading on the slut
 He stole and dallying languidly in bed subdued.
 In such circumstances, beautiful, beautiful Laodamia,
 Your husband, sweeter than life and soul, was stolen
 From you; swallowing you down from so august a height,
 The swell of love had dipped you into a steep abyss
 Such as the one near Cyllenean Pheneus the Greeks
 Say drains and dries the rich mud of the swamp,
 And Hercules of false paternity is said once to have
 Cut from the marrow of mountains he destroyed
 The time he shot with sure arrows the Stymphalian birds
 At the command of an inferior master,
 So the door to the heavens might be touched by more
 gods
 And Hebe not long be a virgin.
 But your deep love was deeper than that chasm,
 And taught the untamed to endure the yoke.
 Not so dear to a grandparent wearied by old age
 Is the child their only daughter feeds, born to her late in
 life,
 An heir found at last for his grandfather's riches,
 His name put on the testament tablets,
 Quelling the impious hurrahs of a relative now mocked,
 Putting to flight the vulture from the old man's head.
 Nor has any dove rejoiced so much in her snowy
 Mate, though she is said forever to steal kisses
 On her pecking beak, more shamelessly by far
 Than a particularly lascivious woman.

But you alone excelled their great passions

The moment you were united with your blond husband.
Capable then of yielding nothing or only little to Laodamia,

The light of my life brought herself into my arms,
As resplendent in a yellow tunic Cupid

Fluttered around her, now here, now there.

And although she is not satisfied with Catullus alone,

I shall make the most of the stolen pleasures

Of my modest mistress, few and far between,

So as not to live too much by the prudish precepts of
dolts.

Often even Juno, mightiest of the heavenly gods,

Stifled her blazing anger at her husband's indiscretions

And she learnt of very many pleasures

Stolen by All-Wanting Jupiter.

But it is not fair to liken men to gods

(Stop shouldering the thankless task of an anxious
parent!)

Nor did her father lead her to me in marriage

But she came to a house fragrant with Assyrian perfume

And gave me secret and wondrous little gifts in the night,

Taken from the very lap of her own husband.

So it is enough if I am the only one given the day

She marks with a whiter stone.

This gift, performed here in song, all I have managed,

Allius, is sent to you in return for your many favours,

So that this day and other days, and still others,

Should not brush your name with thick rust.

The gods will add to it all the gifts which Themis

Used to bring the dutiful men of old.

May you be happy, both you and your life,

And the house in which my mistress and I played,

And he who first introduced us . . . [corruption in text]

From that first moment all my joys were born,

And far above all the other joys, the woman dearer to me
than myself,
My light, whose living makes life sweet for me.

LXIX

Don't be bewildered, Rufus, as to why no woman
Is willing to lay her delicate thighs beneath you
Even if you ply her with gifts of fine clothes
Or splendid gleaming gemstones.
There is a cruel rumour that does you discredit, according
To which you house a wild goat in your armpits.
Everyone is afraid of it, and no wonder: for it really is
A bad beast, not one a beautiful girl should bed down with.
So either kill the harsh assault on our noses
Or stop wondering why they flee.

LXX

My lady says that she would rather marry no one
But me, not even if Jupiter himself were to ask her.
She says, 'But what a lady says to a lover in the moment
Ought to be written on the wind and running water.'

LXXI

If a sacrificial goat in the armpits took hold of any man
With good reason, or if sloth-inducing gout harms
Anyone deservedly, it's that rival of yours who enjoys your
affair.

Somehow he has contracted both maladies from you,
For whenever he fucks her, both pay the price:
He afflicts her with the odour and he gets the gout.

LXXII

There was a time you said you knew only Catullus,
 Lesbia, that you wouldn't want to hold Jupiter over me.
I loved you then not just as a man loves his girlfriend,
 But as a father loves his sons and sons-in-law.
Now I have got to know you. So even if I burn more deeply
 You are still much cheaper and less significant to me.
How can that be, you say? Because such a wound compels
 a lover
 To love more, but to like less.

LXXIII

Give up expecting anyone to be grateful for anything,
Give up assuming that anyone can learn what is right.
Nothing feels gratitude, nothing comes of acting kindly –
On the contrary, it proves harmful and inconvenient;
So it is with me, on whom no one bears down more heavily
or sharply
Than the man who kept me as his one and only friend.

LXXIV

Gellius had heard his uncle often reprimand

Someone if they spoke of pleasure or practised it.

So that this should not happen to him

He rubbed his uncle's own wife

And rendered his uncle a silent Harpocrates.

He does what he likes: if he were now to

Have his own uncle suck him, his uncle would not say a
word.

LXXV

My mind has been reduced to this because of you,
Lesbia, and so destroyed itself through its devotion
to you
That it could not now think well of you if you were
exemplary,
Nor stop loving you if you did *everything*.

LXXVI

If a man can take pleasure in recollecting former acts
 Of kindness, when he considers himself to be moral,
 Not to have broken trust that is sacred, not to have
 Abused in any pact the gods' sanctity in the interest
 Of deceiving people, then many joys lie ahead over
 A long life, Catullus, grown for you
 From this love that was rejected.

For whatever men can say or do to be kind
 To someone, it has been said and done by you.

All your kind gestures have perished for being entrusted
 To the heart of a woman who did not care for them.

So why torture yourself any longer?
 Why not take stock in yourself and turn away
 And stop being miserable when the gods do not desire
 you to be?

It is difficult to relinquish suddenly a love that long
 endured.

It is difficult, but you must accomplish it somehow:
 This is your only hope, this is what you must overcome,
 You must do this, whether it is possible or not.

Oh gods, if you can take pity, or if ever you have brought
 Ultimate deliverance to anyone on the very verge of death,
 Look upon me in my misery and, if I have lived my life
 faithfully,

Seize this plague and contagion from me
 Which, like a torpor creeping deep into my limbs,
 Has driven every happiness from my heart.

I am not now asking that she might love me back,
 Or for the impossible – that she court chastity.
 But I wish that I could be well and rid of this terrible
 sickness.

Oh gods, grant me this in return for my morality.

LXXVII

Rufus, a friend and ally for nothing, absolutely nothing,
 (For nothing? I mean for a high and terrible price),
So you've crept up on me, ripped like a flame through my
 guts,

 And stolen all I had from me? I pity myself.
You have, oh oh, miserable poison of my
 Life, oh oh, blot upon my friendship.

LXXVIII

Gallus has brothers. One has a very elegant wife,
The other an elegant son.

Gallus is a handsome man, for he brings together charming
couples

So a beautiful girl goes to bed with a beautiful boy.
Gallus is a stupid man, for he cannot see that he is a
husband

And uncle who is showing his nephew how to be an
adulterer.

LXXVIIIb

But now I grieve because the pure kisses
Of a pure girl have mixed with your filthy spittle.
But you won't get away with it: for all the ages will
Know you and old grandma rumour reveal who you are.

LXXIX

Lesbius is handsome Pulcher. How couldn't he be?

Lesbia prefers him to you and all your people, Catullus.
But let the handsome one sell Catullus and his people
together

If he can find three kisses from the people he knows.

LXXX

What can I say, Gellius, about why those rosy lips of yours
Whiten more than winter snow
When you leave your house at dawn and wake from
Perfect sleep in a summer day's eighth hour?
Something's up. Is the rumour true that
You suck a man's bulging balls?
You bet it is. The ruptured testicles of poor Victor
Proclaim it – and your lips etched in drained semen.

LXXXI

Could there be no one, Juventius, in so large a population,
No beautiful man you were prepared to fall in love with
Besides that guest of yours from the dying seat of Pisaurum,
Paler than a golden statue,
Close to your heart now, whom you dare to favour
Over me, unaware what a crime you are committing?

LXXXII

Quintius, if you want Catullus to owe you his eyes
Or anything else that is dearer than eyes,
Don't steal him from what is far dearer to him
Than his eyes or anything else that is dearer than
eyes.

LXXXIII

Lesbia says a lot of cruel things to me in front of her
husband.

The dolt finds considerable happiness in this.

Mule, do you have no feelings? If she had forgotten me and
kept quiet

She would be cured. But since she barks and abuses
Not only does she remember me but – this is far more pier-
cing –

She is angry. This is how it is, she burns, and she talks.

LXXXIV

Chonvenient, Arrius would say, whenever he wanted
 To say 'convenient', and *hambush* for 'ambush'
 And then assume that he had spoken magnificently
 After he had said *hambush* as much as he could.
 I suppose his mother and his freedman uncle spoke like
 that,

And his maternal grandfather and grandmother too.
 All our ears took a rest after he was sent to Syria:
 They heard the same words, spoken slowly and lightly
 And had no fear over such words from him after that,
 When suddenly a frightful message arrived:
 The Ionian Sea, after Arrius went there,
 Is no longer 'Ionian' but *Hionian*.

LXXXV

I hate and I love, why do I so, perhaps you ask?
I do not know, but I feel it, and I am crucified.

LXXXVI

Quintia is beautiful by popular repute. To my mind she is

Pale, tall, poised: these individual qualities I readily
concede.

But I deny her total beauty, for there is no charm,

No grain of salt in so large a frame.

Lesbia is beautiful since her beauty is total,

And she has stolen every Venus from every woman.

LXXXVII

No woman can truly say that she was loved
As much as my Lesbia was loved by me.
No faith in any pact was ever as great
As that discovered on my part in my love for you.

LXXXVIII

What is he doing, Gellius, the man who fools around with
his mother

And sister and discards his clothes to spend the night?

What *is* he doing, *the man* who prevents his uncle

From being a husband? Do you realise the scale of

The crime he commits? Oh Gellius, not even furthest

Tethys or

Ocean, father of the Nymphs, could wash away a crime
so big.

There is nothing he could do to top that one,

Not even if he were to bend his head and suck himself.

LXXXIX

Gellius is slender. Why wouldn't he be? When he has so
Obliging a mother who lives so healthily, and so
charming
A sister, and so obliging an uncle, and they are all so
endowed with
Female relations, why should he cease to be slim?
Since he touches nothing except what is forbidden to touch
You will find any number of reasons for why he is slim.

XC

May a magus be born from Gellius and his mother
And their nefarious union and may he learn Persian
divination
(For a magician ought to be born from a mother and son
If the impious belief of the Persians is true)
So the son may worship the gods and his hymn be received
As he melts the fat of sacrifice in the flames.

XCI

Gellius, I hoped that you would be loyal to me

In my hour of need, in this loss of love, not so much
Because I had got to know you well or thought you reliable

Or able to keep your mind clear of shame and infamy,
But because I could see that the woman my passion was

Consuming me over was neither your mother nor sister.
However much shared experience connects us,

I did not think this would be enough of an excuse for you.
But you did: so great is the pleasure you take in each

Betrayal if there is something criminal in it.

XCII

Lesbia always speaks badly of me,

 In fact she never keeps quiet about me.

I'll be damned if Lesbia does not love me.

 How can I tell? Because with me it's just the same.

I curse her continuously,

 But I'll be damned if I do not love her.

XCIII

I have absolutely no desire to want to please you, Caesar,
Nor to know the smallest thing about you.

XCIV

Mentula is shagging around. Shagging around, a Cock?
Yes, that's what they say. The pot gathers its own
vegetables.

XCV

Finally, nine summers and nine winters after it was begun

The *Zmyrna* of my Cinna has been published.

In Hatria meanwhile [Volusius produces] five hundred
thousand

[verses] in one year . . . [corruption in text] . . .

Zmyrna will be circulated as far as the deep waters of the
Satrachus in Cyprus,

The centuries grown old will still be reading *Zmyrna*.

But the Annals of Volusius will perish before the Po itself,

Ever providing loose tunics for takeaway mackerel.

XCVb

May the concise testimonials of my friend be dear to my
heart . . .

But let the plebs rejoice in puffed-up Antimachus.

XCVI

If anything we place upon the silent grave
In our grief, Calvus, is ever received,
Then through the longing with which we renew former
loves
And weep for friendships once thrown away,
I know that the early death of Quintilia is not so much
A source of grief but of joy for your love.

XCVII

I did not think anything could distinguish (so may the gods
love me)

Whether I was smelling the mouth or anus of Aemilius.
The former is no cleaner, the latter no dirtier,
Though actually his anus must be the cleaner and
preferable –

For it does not have teeth. Indeed, his mouth has gums,
Old like a wagon box, with teeth a foot-and-a-half long.
What's more when he smiles his mouth is like the
Open cunt of a peeing mule on heat.

He fucks many women and makes himself out to be
charming.

Is he not delivered by mill-turning ass?
If any girl touches him, should we not think her capable
Of licking the arsehole of a diseased executioner?

XCVIII

What people say about verbosity and fatuous speech
Can be said of you, dirty Victius, if of anyone.
With that tongue of yours, should you choose to use it,
You could lick anuses and old leather sandals alike.
If you want to lose us all completely, Victius,
Open your mouth: you will accomplish all you desire.

XCIX

While you were playing, honeyed Juventius, I stole
A little kiss from you, sweeter than sweet ambrosia.
But I suffered for what I took. For over an hour,
I remember, I was nailed to the top of the cross
While I justified myself before you, but even then I could
not
Dampen your anger in the slightest with my tears.
For as soon as the deed was done, you drenched your lips
with drop
Upon drop of water and wiped it away with your soft
fingers
Lest anything contracted from my lips should remain,
As though it were the filthy saliva of an infected whore.
Worse, for all my misery you put me in the hands
Of Cruel Love who tortures me perpetually in every way,
So that sweet little kiss has transformed in my eyes from
Ambrosia to something more woeful than woeful
hellebore.
Since you proffer this as a punishment for wretched love,
Never again from this day forward shall I steal kisses.

C

Caelius is crazy for Aufillenus, Quintius for Aufillena,
The flowers of Verona's youth,
The brother one, his sister the other.

Which is what they call a truly sweet fraternity.
Whom am I to back of the two? Caelius, you.

For your friendship alone saw me through the fire
When the mad flames of passion burned me to the marrow.
May you be happy, Caelius, and a master of love.

CI

Carried through many nations and over many seas,

I have come for this sorrowful funeral, brother,
To give you the final gift of the dead

And to address your mute ashes. There will be no reply,
Since fate has stolen you from me.

Poor brother, snatched from me unworthily.
But accept these sad offerings now, which are handed

To the dead, in the ancient custom of our elders,
Much moistened by a brother's tears.

For now and forever, brother, farewell.

CII

If ever any secret has been kept in tacit confidence by a
friend

Whose loyalty is felt to the depths of the heart,
You will find that I am bound by the laws that sanction
them,

Cornelius, and made a pure Harpocrates for my silence.

CIII

Please, either give me back the ten thousand sesterces, Silo,
And be as wild and irrepressible as you like,
Or, if you're so fond of coins, stop being a pandering
Pimp, and wild, and irrepressible.

CIV

Do you think I was capable of speaking cruelly of my own
life

When she is dearer to me than both my eyes?

I could not have, nor, if I could, would I love so desperately.

But with Tappo you make all things terrible.

CV

Mentula tries to scale the mountain of the Muses.
The Muses hurl him headlong with pitchforks.

CVI

When you see a town crier with a pretty boy,
What to think, but that he longs to sell himself?

CVII

If ever something happens for someone when they are full of
desire

But have no expectations, it is naturally a great thrill.
So it is a thrill for me, too, more precious than gold,
That you come back to me, Lesbia, in the heat of my
desire.

You come back to someone full of desire but with no
expectations.

You come back of your own choice. The sun is
markedly brighter.

Who lives a more fortunate life than me, or could say
There is more to be longed for in life than this?

CVIII

If, Cominius, the consensus be that your white-haired
Old age, soiled by filthy habits, should come to an end,
I have no doubt that first your tongue, a curse on good
men,
Should be cut out and given to the ravenous vulture,
While the black-throated raven feasts on your gouged eyes,
The dogs on your intestines, the wolves on what
remains.

CIX

You dangle before me, my love and life, the prospect
That this love of ours will be cherished and last forever.
Great gods, make it that she can promise truthfully,
And say it sincerely and from her heart
So that we may live our whole lives
By this everlasting pact of sanctified love.

CX

Aufillena, good girlfriends are always praised,
They accept the reward for what they undertake.
But you, you made me a promise but deceive me like an
enemy,
And your constant taking but never giving is a crime.
A generous girl acts on her word, a chaste one makes no
promise,
Aufillena. But to snatch away what was already pledged
By withholding your services is worse than the greed of a
whore
Who prostitutes herself with her whole body.

CXI

Aufillena, to live happily with one's husband alone
Is the joy of all joys for a bride.
But better one sleeps with whomever one likes
Than becomes mother to cousins by an uncle.

CXII

You are all man, Naso, but not all men
Go down on you. Naso, you are all man and passive.

CXIII

During Pompey's first consulship, Cinna, two men carried on
With young Maecilia. Now he's been made consul again
The two remain, but a thousand men compete
Against each. Fertile is the seed of adultery.

CXIV

They're not wrong when they say Mentula is rich
In his estate at Fermo, which contains so many riches
itself:
Every breed of fowl, fish, meadows, fields and game.
But it's pointless: his expenditure outstrips his produce.
So I concede he's rich, though everything is empty.
Let's praise his pastures – so long as he's in need
himself.

CXV

Mentula has the equivalent of thirty acres of pasture,
Forty of arable land; the rest are waters.
Why should he not rival Croesus in his wealth
When he has so many attractions in his estates,
Meadows, fields, huge woods and deep swamps
As far as the Hyperboreans and sea of Ocean?
All these things are sizeable, but he himself is greatest of all,
Not a man, but in fact a huge threatening MENTULA.

CXVI

I often search my mind, madly racing,
 That I may send you Callimachean lines
To soften you towards me, quell your attempts
 To hurl cruel barbs at my head.
But now I see my task was taken up in vain,
 Gellius, that in this respect my prayers faltered.
I shall dodge those weapons you drive against me,
 And pinned by mine you shall pay the price.

Notes

- 1 Robert Lowell's obituary of Robert Frost, *New York Review of Books*, 1 February 1963.
- 2 Catullus, Poem 50.
- 3 Catullus, Poem 44.
- 4 Poems once inserted at 19–20 are believed to be spurious, and are therefore omitted. Also omitted is the fragment attributed to Catullus once inserted at 18.
- 5 Thank you to Claire Jamset and Hugo Williams for their helpful suggestions on the translated poems.
- 6 In an interview in 1961 with Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, transcribed in Jeffrey Meyers, *Robert Lowell: Interviews and Memoirs* (University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1988) p. 38.
- 7 Keats' *Hyperion* is lengthy in itself, but Frost read aloud just the opening, in which much is expressed in little space.
- 8 Prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia*, Fragment 1.28.
- 9 Thank you to Giles and Alexandra Milton for discussions about the kiss poems.
- 10 See Nisbet, R. G. M., and S. Harrison (eds), *Collected Papers on Latin Literature* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 411.
- 11 Robert Frost, in a unpublished lecture of 1947; and *Selected Letters*, p. 248, cited in Tim Kendall, *The Art of Robert Frost* (New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 2012) p. 324.
- 12 Throughout, I consult principally Kenneth Quinn's Latin text and commentary, with an eye also on the Oxford classical text of R. A. B. Mynors.
- 13 I have positioned this poem here as '58b', as it appears to have originated as part of Poem 55.

*I hate and I love, why do I so, perhaps you ask?
I do not know, but I feel it, and I am crucified.*

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